

KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA
MINISTRY OF HIGHER EDUCATION

IMAM MUHAMMAD
IBN SA'UD ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY
RESEARCH CENTRE



وَمِنَ اللَّيْلِ يَسْجُدُ وَيَذْكُرُ
الْحَمْدَ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي هَدَانَا
لِلْإِسْلَامِ رَبَّنَا إِنَّكَ
أَنْتَ الْغَنِيُّ الْكَافِيُّ
مركز البحوث

HISTORY OF THE MUSLIMS OF BENGAL

VOLUME I B
SURVEY OF ADMINISTRATION,
SOCIETY AND CULTURE

BY
MUHAMMAD MOHAR ALI
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DEPARTMENT OF CULTURE AND PUBLICATIONS

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وَاللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ خَبِيرٌ
وَاللَّهُ يَوْمَ يُنْفَخُ الْكِتَابُ وَهُوَ الْحَكِيمُ
مَرْكَزُ الْبَحْثِ

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PREFACE

This part of the book gives a survey of the administration, society and culture during the period of Muslim rule. Although information on the subject is rather meagre, an attempt has been made to bring out the salient features of the administrative system in the light of inscriptions, coins and other contemporary sources. Similarly attention has been focussed on the theories regarding the origin of Bengal Muslims, formation of the Muslim society and their social and religious life. The educational and literary activities have been discussed against the background of their social life and it has been emphasized that the Bengali language assumed its literary form under the care and patronage of the Muslim rulers. The section on art and architecture traces the main developments in these two spheres which derived their spirit and form from both the traditions of Islam in these fields and the local needs and circumstances. The survey of economic condition brings out the interesting fact that in sharp contrast with the present situation Bengal enjoyed enviable affluence and prosperity throughout the centuries of Muslim rule.

Riyadh,
10 Rabī' I, 1406 H.
(22 Nov., 1985)

M.M. Ali

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PART V

SURVEY OF ADMINISTRATION, SOCIETY
AND CULTURE

CHAPTER XXVII
GOVERNMENT AND ADMINISTRATION:
ADMINISTRATION OF THE BENGAL SULTANAT

An account of the Muslim administration in Bengal naturally falls into two broad sections—the pre-Mughal and the Mughal period. The pre-Mughal period is by far the longer, covering about four hundred years. During this period Muslim Bengal was a distinct political entity, a *Sultānat* except for a short and rather disturbed interval of about sixty years at the initial stage, from 1227 to 1286,¹ and for another short interval of 15 years from 1539 to 1553, covering the rule of Sher Shāh Sūr and Islām Shāh Sūr. The patterns of administration at both Bengal and Delhi were however similar mainly because the ruling groups at both the places belonged to the same stocks of people, namely, Turks, Afghans, Persians and Arabs, and were as such generally imbued with the administrative ideas and traditions of the 'Abbāsīd *Khilāfat*. During the Mughal period, on the other hand, Bengal formed a part of the Mughal state and was administered like its other provinces by governors appointed by the Mughal rulers of Delhi. Even then the Mughals had to take into account the system evolved by their predecessors in Bengal and had necessarily to adjust their system with its physical and other circumstances. Effective Mughal authority was exercised, however, only for a century, from the early years of the seventeenth to the early years of the eighteenth century. After Aurangzeb 'Ālamgīr's death in 1707 his vicerey Murshid Qulī Khān, like some other of the provincial viceroys, became virtually independent in Bengal. Murshid Qulī Khān's successors were independent for all practical purposes, though they paid nominal allegiance and occasional revenue to the Mughal rulers of Delhi.

I: THE SULTĀN

Like much of its political history, information about the

¹ Of the 15 persons ruling in Bengal during these 60 years, 8 were appointed by the Delhi Sultāns. The remaining 7 captured power by force of arms, either acknowledging or not acknowledging the Delhi Sultān's authority. As a result even out of these sixty years the Delhi Sultān had effective control over Bengal for only 39 years. Of the remaining 21 years different governors were independent for all practical purposes for 18 years, while only one governor, Malik 'Izz al-Dīn Yūzbūkī, was semi-independent for 3 years, issuing coins in the joint-names of himself and the Delhi Sultān.

administrative system of the Bengal Sultānat also is derived from coins, inscriptions and stray references in contemporary historical writings and literary works, both Persian and Bengali; and also, to some extent, from the accounts of early European travellers. The picture that emerges is thus by no means comprehensive. Nonetheless the broad outlines of the system are pretty clear.

Like the rulers of Ghazni, Ghor and Delhi, the ruler in Bengal also assumed the general title of *Sultān* and was like them the head of the government in all its branches, civil, military and judicial. Like them, again, the Bengal Sultān also proclaimed his assumption of supreme power by issuing coins and having the *khutba* (Friday congregational prayer sermon) read in his name. The issuing of coins does not, however, appear all along to be a centralized affair or an exclusive prerogative of the reigning Sultān. Most of the Sultāns issued coins from a number of mint-towns scattered throughout his dominions. More than twenty mint-towns are mentioned in the coins of the Bengal Sultāns so far discovered.¹ Although several of the names appear to be synonyms, the exact number of separate mint-towns would not in any case be less than a dozen. The most important of these mint-towns were Lakhnawatī (Gaud), Fīrūzābād (Pandua), Sāt-gāon (near Hugli), Sunārgāon (near Dacca), Mu'azzamābād (in Mymensingh), Fathābād (Faridpur), Khilāfatābād (Bagerhat, in Khulna district), Chāt-gāon (Chittagong) and Chawalistān alias Kām-rū (Assam). More remarkable was the fact that some of the Bengal Sultāns allowed their crown princes to issue coins in their own names and even to adopt the title of *Sultān* in those coins.²

Besides the general designation of *Sultān*, the ruler adopted a variety of other titles. Some of these titles were merely ornamental, while the others were clearly indicative of the spirit of his rule. Of the ornamental ones mention may be made of *Sultān al-Mu'azzam* (the Great Sultān), *al-Sultān al-A'zam* (the Greatest Sultan), *Sultān al-Salātīn* (the Sultān of the Sultāns), *Sultān al-Zamān* (Sultān of the Time), *Malik Riqāb al-Umam*

¹ *Catalogue*, II, 141-142. See also Mir Jahan, "Mint-towns in Medieval Bengal", *Proceedings of the Pakistan History Conference*, third session, Dacca, 1953.

² *Supra*, pp. 111-112, 213. See also *Catalogue*, II, 177, No. 211.

(Master of the Necks of Nations), *Maulā Mulūk al-Turk wa al-A'jam* (Protector of the Kings of the Turks and the Persians), *Sikandar al-Thānī* (The Second Alexander), etc. Of the titles expressive of the spirit of the government the most common ones mentioned on both coins and inscriptions are, besides those relating to the question of *Khilāfat*, *Nāṣir al-Islām wa al-Muslimīn* (Helper of Islam and the Muslims), *Ghauth al-Islām wa al-Muslimīn* (Aider of Islam and Muslims), *al-Mujāhid fī sabīl al-Raḥmān* (The fighter in the way of the Most Merciful), *al-'Ādil* (the Just), *Al-Bādhil* (the Benevolent), etc. At times the ruler even emphasized that he was the "Owner of the Crown and the Seal" (*Ṣāhib al-Tāj wa al-Khatam*).

Despite such grandiloquent titles and outward decorations the Sultān's position was by no means absolute, nor hereditary. Some of them did indeed succeed their fathers on the throne, but in general the rule of hereditary succession or of primogeniture was never quite established. Indeed the absence of any fixed rule of succession was one of the main drawbacks of the Muslim administration in Bengal. This accounts for much of the instability and internecine struggles noticed in the period. At least two factors appear to have militated against the evolution of a fixed rule of succession. Throughout the period there were fresh arrivals of Muslim nobles and adventurers from different countries at different times. And each time there was such an influx in any sizeable number it introduced a new factor in the balance of power-politics leading either to a dynastic revolution or at least to a change in the line of succession. Secondly, the spirit of equality fostered by Islam did away with distinctions based on birth, race and colour and threw career open to talent. Thus the spectacle of a man of humble origin, a new convert or of a slave becoming the leader of the community and occupying the seat of government did not appear unreasonable or out of tune with the political and constitutional norm if he had otherwise the necessary qualities and support for him.

The absence of any settled rule of succession and the probability of being overthrown at any time by a rival group

made the Sultān responsive to the feelings of the people whom he governed and prompted him to secure at least the tacit approval of his rule by the immediate groups around him. A more positive check upon his power was however the supremacy of the *sharī'a*. He had to act according to the principles of Islam and had in fact no power to make any change in the fundamental laws of the society. His position was only to enforce *the law*. This need for popular support on the one hand and conformity with the fundamental principles of Islam on the other seems to lie at the root of three important developments of a constitutional nature, namely, the power and influence exercised by the '*ulamā*', the Sultān's endeavour to champion the cause of Islam, and the influence exerted by the nobility in matters of administration and succession to the *sulṭanat*.

The '*ulamā*' (literally the learned men) were the acknowledged guardians and interpreters of the *sharī'a* (the laws of Islam). They played a very important role in the country's administration and politics throughout the period. Broadly, their function as a group was three-fold. First and foremost, they were teachers to the community and were the repository of education and learning. It was they who provided teachers and managers for all the educational establishments in the country.¹ It also naturally fell to them to train lawyers and judges for the judicial administration. Secondly, and arising out of this latter aspect of their position, it was from their cadre that all the judges of the land were recruited. Some of the judges (*qāḍīs*) were themselves great patrons of learning.² Thirdly, the '*ulamā*' acted as an advisory and consultative body for the Sultān and sometimes determined high policies of state including the question of succession. This position of theirs seems to have been at its highest during the Ilyās Shāhī period. Indeed it appears that Ilyās Shāh himself came to power with the assistance of a great '*ālim*', Shaikh 'Alā' al-Ḥaqq³, who became the founder of an influential school of '*ulamā*' in the country. Ilyās Shāh's successors attempted

¹ *Infra*, pp. 832-838.

² *Infra*, pp. 830-832.

³ See *E.I.M.*, 1939-40, 7-8.

to curb the influence of the *ulamā'* but did not succeed. The most repressive policy against them was pursued by the usurper Rājā Kāns,¹ but this only recoiled upon him. Shaikh 'Alā' al-Ḥaḡ's able son, Shaikh Nūr Qutb al-'Ālam, organized a successful opposition to Kāns's policies resulting, as noted earlier, in the conversion of Kāns's son to Islam, his elevation to the seat of government and his enthusiastic patronage of Islam. This incident had an abiding influence on the policies of subsequent Sultāns all of whom took care never to alienate the '*ulamā'*' and throw them into opposition.

In line with the above policy the Sultāns proclaimed in their most important public records, namely, coins and inscriptions, their adherence to and support for the cause of Islam. Thus, with the exception of a very few rulers, the coins of all the others are found to contain the first *kalima* (لا إله إلا الله محمد رسول الله) declaring that there is no Lord but Allah and that Muḥammad (Peace be on him) is His Messenger. Even with regard to those whose coins do not bear the *kalima* it should be remembered that not all their coins have necessarily been discovered. Similarly on their coins and inscriptions the Sultāns proclaimed themselves "helper of Islam and the Muslims" and expressions to that effect. More important still, the Sultāns related their rule with the wider world of Islam and emphasized that their government did not constitute any breach with the Islamic *Khilāfat*. Thus beginning with Ghiyāth al-Dīn 'Iwāḍ Khālījī (608-624/1211-1226) many of the Sultāns described themselves on their coins and inscriptions as "Helper of the Commander of the Faithful" (*Nāṣir 'Amīr al-Mu'minīn*) or "The Right Hand of the Khalīfa of Allāh" (*Yamīn Khalīfat Allāh*). Sultān Muḡhīth al-Dīn Yūzbak (644-656/1246-1258) started the practice of even inscribing the name of the last 'Abbāsīd Khalīfa, Al-Musta'ṣim, on the coins, which continued to be done till the time of Sultān Ghiyāth al-Dīn Bahādur Shāh (710-723/1310-1323) although the 'Abbāsīd Khalīfa had long been dead and although the *Khilāfat* itself had been dismembered. The Ilyās Shāhi Sultāns dropped the name of the 'Abbāsīd Khalīfa from their coins, but continued to describe

¹ *Supra*, p. 153.

themselves "Helper" etc. of the Commander of the Faithful or of the Khalīfa till Kāns's usurpation. Jalāl al-Dīn Muhammad Shāh (818-835/1415-1431), the converted son of Rājā Kāns, at first inscribed the names of the first four Khalīfas on his coins and also described himself as the "Helper of the Commander of the Faithful",¹ but later on himself assumed the title of Khalīfa on his coins.² This title of Khalīfa was borne by all the succeeding Sultāns till the Abyssinian ruler Nāṣir al-Dīn Mahmūd Shāh (895-896/1489-1490).³ 'Alā' al-Dīn Husain Shāh, founder of the Arab dynasty, called himself on his coins and inscriptions "Khalīfa of Allah by Proof and Evidence" and also inscribed the names of the first four Khalīfas on some of his coins, besides emphasizing his connection with the Prophet's family.⁴ The position after Husain Shāh is not clear.

Thirdly, the Sultān's need for popular support paved the way for the influence of the nobility. This nobility was not of course hereditary, but a heterogeneous and fluctuating group varying in size and composition from time to time. They embraced within their group the 'amīrs, (nobles), malīks and high officials who surrounded the Sultān. Even slaves were included in the group and acted as influential nobles and wazīrs (ministers). They exercised considerable influence upon the Sultān in matters of administration; and had almost always a say regarding the question of succession. Ilyās Shāh, the first really independent Sultān of Bengal, himself came to power with the help of such a group of nobles. He "in concert with the 'amīrs gave himself the title of Sultān", writes the author of the *Ṭabaqāt-i-Akbarī*, "and had public prayers read in his name."⁵ When Ilyās Shāh died "the 'amīrs and the chiefs of the different groups, on the third day after his death, placed his eldest son on the throne of the empire, giving him the title of Sikandar Shāh."⁶ Again, when the latter died the nobility gave the "title of Sultān Ghiyāth ud-dīn to his son and

¹ See *Catalogue*, II, 162, No. 102.

² *Ibid.*, 163, No. 104; also *supra*, pp. 162-163.

³ *Ibid.*, 163-167.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 172, No. 167; also *supra*, pp. 184-185, 207-210.

⁵ *Tab.* III, 421.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 424-425.

seated him on the throne.”¹ Indeed throughout the period the nobility continued to have a say on the question of succession.² Sometimes this was merely formal, but at times they appear to have a rather decisive voice in the matter. Thus after the murder of Sultān Shams al-Dīn Ahmad Shāh (son of Sultān Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad Shāh) the nobility disallowed the slave Nāṣir, who had declared himself Sultān, to succeed to the throne on the ground that he did not have the right or qualifications for that high office, and restored a descendant of Ilyās Shāh, Nāṣir al-Dīn Maḥmūd Shāh (846-864/1442-1459), to the throne.³ They played a similar role after the murder of Fath Shāh when they ousted the usurper eunuch Bārbak and, with the consent of the queen of the murdered Sultān, offered the throne to Malīk Andil who ruled for an interim period from 892-895/1486-1489 under the title of Sultān Saif al-Dīn Fīrūz Shāh II.⁴

Thus the power of the Sultān was limited by the supremacy of the *Sharī'a* which he was bound to follow, by the need for carrying the community with him and, above all, by an influential group of nobles who at times determined the question of succession. The government of the Bengal Sultānat was therefore never despotic or autocratic although some of the Sultāns were really powerful rulers, especially in their relationship with the neighbouring states. It was all through broad-based on the principles of Islam and on the acquiescence or approval of the people.

II: THE SEAT OF GOVERNMENT AND THE SULTAN'S HOUSEHOLD

Corresponding roughly with the changes in the lines of succession and, at times necessitated by changes in the river course, the seat of government also changed from time to time. Muḥammad bin Bakhtiyār Khaljī fixed his capital at Lakhnawatī (Gaud, in Malda district) which continued as such for over a century.⁵ Early in the Ilyās Shāhī period it was removed to

¹ *Ibid.*, 427-428.

² *Ibid.*, 429-30, 433-434, 435, 437, 439-440, 441, 443, 444.

³ *Ibid.*, 434-435; *Tarikh-i-Firishta*, II (Newal Kishore edition), 299.

⁴ *Tab.* III, 439-440; *Riyād*, 122, 124.

⁵ On the eve of his Tibet expedition Muḥammad bin Bakhtiyār appears to have fixed his headquarters at Deokot in Dinajpur district.

Fīrūzabād (Pandua) about 20 miles to the north-east of Lakhnawatī which was henceforth reduced to the position of a royal suburb, the "Windsor of Bengal".¹ About the same time Sunārgāon (near Dacca) also became the seat of a rival government for a short time (1338-1353) under Fakhr al-Dīn Mubārak Shāh and his successor Ikhtiyār al-Dīn Ghāzī Shāh. However, Fīrūzabād remained the capital for five successive reigns when it was retransferred to Lakhnawatī either by Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad Shāh or by Nāṣir al-Dīn Maḥmūd Shāh I. Early in his reign Sulṭān 'Alā' al-Dīn Ḥusain Shāh transferred his capital to Ekdala (Dinajpur district).² Sometime afterwards, however, it was again transferred to Lakhnawatī. Finally the Afghan ruler Sulaimān Karrānī removed the capital in 1564 to Tanda (Malda district). It has entirely disappeared, most probably because of changes in the river course, and its site cannot now be accurately determined.

The capital was usually fortified for reasons of defence and security. The locality of Gauḍ itself was very strategic, "for the west face of the city was washed by the main stream of the Ganges, and the south was protected by a small affluent, while on the east were perennial swamps, and on the north strong lines of fortifications. The whole area was guarded from inundation by great embankments."³ It was also easy from that place to keep contact with south and east Bengal as well as with Bihar, the whole or part of which was included in the Bengal Sulṭānat throughout the period. Obviously for these reasons the other seats of government like Fīrūzabād (Pandua) and Tanda were not far removed from the place.⁴ The city of Gauḍ covered an area of some twenty to thirty square miles and it contained an inner citadel which was strongly fortified on all sides.

The Sulṭān maintained a splendid court within the citadel with all the necessary security arrangements. It is definitely known that at least since the time of the later Ilyās Shāhīs a large

¹ W.N. Wright, *Catalogue*, 141.

² See E.V. Westmacott, "Note on the site of Fort Ekdala, District Dinajpur", *J.A.S.B.*, 1874, No. 3, 244-245.

³ W.N. Wright, *Catalogue*, 141.

⁴ Among other reasons, the separation of Bihar and its constitution into a province enabled the Mughals to fix the Bengal capital at Jahāngīrnagar (Dacca).

number of Abyssinian slaves and a body of some five thousand foot-soldiers (*pāiks*) constantly remained on duty in and around the court. The "five thousand *paiks* attended every night for watch and ward, and early in the morning, the *bādshāh* [Sultān] came out, and sat on the throne for a moment, and took their salute, and gave them permission to go away, when another body of *paiks* came into attendance."¹ The *pāiks* and the Abyssinian slaves became in course of time a source of trouble which ultimately led to the "Abyssinian usurpation": Alā' al-Dīn Husain Shāh disbanded the *pāiks* and the Abyssinian guards, but appointed in their place a different set of body-guards. According to a sixteenth century Chinese account² the palace was heavily guarded by soldiers. The visiting Chinese envoys were led to the Sultān's presence alternately by two usherers with silver staff and two others with gold staff, amidst salutations at intervals and various other ceremonies and etiquette. The Sultān used to sit on a high throne inlaid with precious stones. The contemporary poet Krittivāsa also states that he had to cross nine halls before he could reach the presence of the Sultān who was surrounded by high officials and nobles.

The Sultān had a regular and elaborate household establishment with officers responsible for specific aspects of business. A few of such official names are found in the contemporary sources. These are the *hājib*, the *silāḥdār*, the *sharābdār*, the *jāmdār* and the *dārbān*. *Hājib* was an officer of the royal household at Delhi also where his duties included looking after the court ceremonies and marshalling of officers and nobles in order of precedence and rank.³ There are indications that the *hājib* at the Bengal Sultān's court had similar duties. Thus Sultān Sikandar Shāh (759-792/1358-1390), when besieged in the Ekdala fort by Sultān Fīrūz Shāh Tughlaq of Delhi, had sent the *hājib* to the latter with presents and proposals for a settlement. It was also the *hājib* who presented Qādī Sirāj al-Dīn's peon before Sultān Ghiyāth al-Dīn A'zam

¹ *Tab.*, III, 438.

² Translated in *Visva Bhārati Annals*, Vol. I., Santiniketan, 1945, 121-122.

³ I.H. Qureshi, *Administration of the Sultanat of Delhi*, 2nd edition, Lahore, 1944, 61.

Shāh who was summoned to answer a charge of murder preferred against him.¹ The *silāḥdar* was obviously an officer in charge of the Sultān's arms and armour and was as such attached to his person. Fakhra, who had been *silāḥdar* of the Sunārgāon governor Bahrām subsequently became the ruler of that place and assumed the title of Sultān Fakhr al-Dīn Mubārak Shāh.² *Sharābdār*, as the name indicates, was in charge of the Sultān's drinks. As poison could be easily administered through drinks, the post of *sharābdār* was necessarily a very responsible one and it was entrusted only to a person having the ruler's full trust and confidence. An inscription of the time of 'Alā' al-Dīn Husain Shāh mentions Rukn Khān, governor of the province of north Bengal with the rank of *wazīr* (minister) as *Sharābdār Ghair Maḥallī* (Superintendent of royal drinks outside the palace).³ This shows that the responsibility for the Sultān's drinks was given to a person holding a very high rank, probably not below that of a *wazīr*. Similar responsibility was attached to the post of *jāmdār* who was in charge of the royal wardrobe. An inscription of the time of Sultān Rukn al-Dīn Bārbak Shāh (864-879/1459-1474) mentions his governor of the province of west Bengal Iqrār Khān, who also held the rank of *wazīr*, as *Jāmdār Ghair Maḥallī* (Keeper of the royal wardrobe outside the palace).⁴ The same term occurs in connection with 'Alā' al-Dīn Husain Shāh's governor and *wazīr* of the eastern province of Dacca-Mymensingh, Khālīṣ Khān.⁵ It is thus evident that for attending the Sultān when he was away from the capital on campaigns or tours, such household responsibilities as the charge for his drinks and wardrobe were entrusted to a different and trusted set of officials, often the governor and administrator of the locality which the Sultān was to visit. *Dārbān* was the gate-keeper of the palace and was an equally important officer occupying a vital position in respect of the Sultān's personal safety and security. It has already been seen that the *wazīr*

¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 106-108. ; see also *supra*, pp. 141-142.

² *supra*, p. 120.

³ Deokot (Maulana 'Atā's tomb) inscription of 918/1542, Dani, *Bibliography* No. 105.

⁴ Tribeni (Sātgaon) Inscription of the time of Rukn al-Dīn Bārbak Shāh, dated 860/1455, S. Ahmed, *Inscriptions*, 68-69.

⁵ Sylhet (Shāh Jalāl's tomb) Inscription, dated 911/505, Dani, *Bibliography*, No. 92.

Malik Andil avenged the murder of his master Sultān Fath Shāh with the *dārbān*'s help.¹

Besides these officers there must have been many others in the Sultān's household, though their names have not unfortunately reached us. The biographers of the Vaishnava leader Chaitanya who lived during the time of 'Alā' al-Dīn Husain Shāh refer to one Kesava as the *chatrī* or umbrella-holder of the Sultān. Kesava is also described as the chief of the Sultān's guards.² There is also reference in the Bengālī literature to the Sultān's private physician who is given the designation of *antaranga*.³

III: THE CENTRAL OFFICERS AND MINISTERS

Apart from the household officials the Sultān had to depend on the services of a large number of officials to assist him in the different branches of administration such as revenue, finance, justice, police, correspondence, information, defence and military affairs, etc. These officials were also members of the nobility who surrounded the Sultān. Besides their official designations they were decorated with a variety of titles indicative of their rank and position. Such titles generally stemmed from the words *Khān*, *Malik*, *Majlis*, *Khāqān*, *Ulugh*, etc.⁴ Thus we come across *Khān-i-A'zam* (the greatest *Khān*), *Khān-i-A'zam Khān Jahān* (the greatest *Khān*, *Khān* of the world), *Khān-i-Khānān* (*Khān* of the *Khāns*), *Malik al-Mu'azzam* (the exalted *Malik*), *Malik al-'Umarā' wa al-Wuzarā'* (Lord of nobles and of ministers), *Khān-i-Majlis* (*Khān* of the Assemblage), *Majlis al-Majālis Majlis 'Alā* (the highest member of all the assemblages), *Khāqān-i-Mu'azzam* (the exalted *Khāqān*), *Ulugh al-A'zam* (the greatest *Ulugh*), *Ulugh Masnad Khān Malik* (*Ulugh* of the court, and *Khān* and *Malik*), etc.⁵ Even a cursory glance at these titles makes it clear that there were graded ranks among the officials and the nobility and that the titles often appertained to the principal functions or privileges of the recipients concerned. Thus we find

¹ *Supra*, pp. 177-178.

² Krishnadas Kavirāj, *Chaitanya Charitāmrita* (Beng. text, ed. Atul Krishna Goswāmī), Calcutta, 1325 B.E., p. 76.

³ Sukumar Sen, *Madhya Juger Bānglā O Bāngālī*, p. 8., quoted in Tarfdar, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

⁴ These words are almost synonymous, meaning Lord or Prince.

⁵ For a full list See Dai, *Bibliography*, 94 ff. and chart 3 facing page 102.

different grades among each of the categories of *Khān*, *Malik*, *Majlis* etc. We can also distinguish between the different natures of their offices. Thus titles like *Sikandar al-Thāni* (the Second Alexander), *Pahlavi-i-‘aṣr wa al-zamān* (the Hero of the Age and Time) clearly refer to persons holding military ranks, while those like *Majlis al-Majālis Majlis ‘Alā* indicate that the holders had some consultative functions with perhaps the privilege of access to and assemblage with the Sultān.

The most important official designation mentioned in the sources appears to be *wazīr*, which may be translated as “minister”. That there were a number of *wazīrs* is clear from the historical texts as well as from the title like *Malik al-Wuzarā’* (Lord of the ministers) found in inscriptions. It may be assumed that the ministers were charged with specific administrative departments, though we have also evidence of one particular *wazīr* dealing with a number of distinct departments. There are at least two inscriptions where the term *Wazīr-i-Lashkar* occurs. It might be interpreted as minister in charge of the military or defence affairs.¹ Another inscription mentions the title of *Wazīr Dūn Dar-Sharq* or minister in charge of external affairs in the east.² It may therefore be easily assumed that external or foreign affairs were entrusted to the charge of a minister, though that particular office or title is not available in the sources. It is not definitely known whether there was any Prime Minister, though the term *Malik al-Wuzarā’* (Lord of the ministers) would tend to support such a conclusion. We have however the names of some very powerful *wazīrs* each of whom was outstanding among his colleagues and other officials at court, had the charge of important departments like revenue, finance and military pay and each supplanted his master and captured the reins of government. These were Rājā Kāns, Malik Andil (under Fath Shāh), Ḥabshī Khān (under Nāṣir al-Dīn Maḥmūd Shāh II) and Sayyid Ḥusain Makki (later on ‘Alā’ al-Dīn Ḥusain Shāh).³ Bengali literature of

¹ See *infra*.

² Baliaghata (Jangipur) Inscription of the time of Nāṣir al-Dīn Maḥmūd Shāh, dated 847/1443, Dani, *Bibliography*, No. 21; S. Ahmed, *Inscriptions*, 50-51.

³ *Supra*.

the Husain Shāhī period mentions the term *mahāmantrin*¹ which may mean either the "great minister" or the "chief minister". It has also been stated that the "Prime Minister of Husain Shāh was Purandar Khan, a Kāyastha by caste (his original name being Gopināth Bose)".² This particular piece of information, however, has to be taken with caution, for the description in the Bengali literature appears rather fictitious than historical. In any case, it would be wrong to suggest that the *Malik al-Wuzarā'* or the *mahāmantrin* was comparable in any way with the position of the Prime Minister in the modern sense of the term. Generally the Sultān had the exclusive power of appointing and dismissing his *wazīrs* as he appointed other officers. The power and influence of individual ministers varied in accordance with the power and calibre of the Sultān under whom they served. The extraordinary power exercised by the four above mentioned great *wazīrs* was due more to the circumstances of the time and the personal character of the Sultāns than to any constitutional factor. That the *wazīr* was essentially an officer is evident from the fact that he was not exclusively attached to court. Persons holding the rank and title of *wazīr* were often appointed governors and administrators over important divisions of the state. Indeed, it would not be wrong to assume that provincial governors were generally given the rank of *wazīrs*, or, conversely, *wazīrs* were usually sent out as governors over different provinces.³

Two other central posts mentioned in the Bengali literature are *Dabir Khās* (*Dabīr-i-Khāṣ*) and *Sāker Malik* (*Ṣaghīr Malīk?*). They are also referred to as *wazīrs* and it is further stated that two brothers, Sanātan and Rūpa, respectively held these posts under 'Alā al-Dīn Husain Shāh.⁴ *Dabīr Khāṣ* appears to have been responsible for the Sultān's correspondence and had necessarily under him a number of subordinate officials, as the term *Khāṣ* (special or personal) indicates. The contemporary Delhi rulers had an elaborate department in charge of correspondence.⁵ Hence it

¹ S.K.De, *Early History of the Vaisnava faith and movement in Bengal*, Calcutta, 1942, 110.

² *Memoirs*, 34.

³ See *infra*.

⁴ *Memoirs*, 34.

⁵ Qureshi, *op.cit.*, 86.

can be safely assumed that the Bengal Sultān had also a similar establishment to deal with his multifarious correspondence with officials in different localities as well as with others. We have at least one definite reference to a writer engaged under the Sultān bearing the title of *Zarīn-dast* (golden-handed) presumably because of his excellent hand-writing.¹ The term *Sāker Malīk* has been thought to mean the Chief Secretary of the Sultān,² though "the word *Sāker* or *Ṣaghīr* [small, petty]", as one writer very aptly points out, "does not warrant such an opinion."³

Very few other official designations are known from the sources. The Deokot inscription of the time of 'Alā' al-Dīn Husain Shāh dated 918/1512 makes reference to the *Dīwān-i-Kotwālī* or police department of the "renowned city of Fīrūzabād" (Pandua) and to its chief police officer (*Kotwāl-bak-'Alā*).⁴ The department had definitely its central counterpart, as it was the case with the Delhi Sultānat, for the maintenance of law and order and punishment of crimes were undoubtedly important aspects of the administration. The detection of crimes and the need for keeping a watch on distant places and the officials posted there necessitated some sort of a secret information service. The Bengali literature makes reference to spies or secret agents who were called *jāsu* or *dāni*,⁵ and these, again, must have acted under a central department. There was also a Head *Qāḍī* (Chief Justice) in the capital city who heard cases in the first instance as well as on appeals from the judgements of other *qāḍīs*.

IV: LOCAL GOVERNMENT

For convenience of administration the territory of the Sultānat was divided into a number of units or provinces which generally corresponded with its main geographical divisions. Muḥammad bin Bakhtiyār Khaljī, as mentioned earlier, divided his newly established dominion into three main regions placing

¹ Deokot inscription of the time of Sikandar Shāh dated 765/1363, Dani, *Bibliography*, No. 14.

² Sukumar Sen, *Bangla Sāhityer Itihās*, Calcutta, 1940, 73.

³ A. Karim, "Aspects of Muslims Administration, etc." *op.cit.*, 84.

⁴ Deokot inscription of the time of 'Alā' al-Dīn Husain Shāh dated 918/1512, Dani, *op.cit.*, No. 105.

⁵ Brindāvan Dās, *Chaitanya Bhāgavat*, quoted in Tarafdar, *op.cit.*, 101.

them under the charge of his three principal lieutenants. These were the south-western region comprising mainly the districts of Murshidabad, Nadia, Birbhum and Burdwan, lying to the south south-west of the river Ganges; the north-western region, lying to the north of the river and embracing mainly the district of Malda and parts of eastern Bihar; and the north-eastern region, also lying to the north of the river Ganges, comprising mainly the districts of Rajshahi, Bogra, Dinajpur and Rangpur. By the time of Sultān Shams al-Dīn Firūz Shāh (701-722/1301-1322) the Muslim dominion was extended in the east upto Sylhet; and the intervening parts of central and southern Bengal embracing at least the districts of Faridpur and Jessore also came under the Muslims' jurisdiction. From that time till the end the territory of the Bengal Sultānat included practically the whole of Bengal as it is now known, together with the major part of Bihar in the west, and parts of Assam and also Tripura in the east.

The pattern of administrative divisions indicated by geography and Muḥammad bin Bakhtiyār Khaljī's practice continued to be followed by subsequent rulers. Thus even when the Tughlaq rulers of Delhi temporarily subdued the Laknawatī Sultānat they divided the territory into three sub-provinces or regions, namely, the Lakhnawatī region (north Bengal), the Sātgaon region (west Bengal) and the Sunārgaon region (east Bengal), placing a deputy governor over each. It may be presumed that the districts of central and southern Bengal were apportioned between the Sātgaon and Sunārgaon regions. It may be recalled that it was out of the rivalry among the administrators of these three regions that the Ilyās Shāhī Sultānat of Bengal ultimately emerged. Even after the unification of these three regions under the Ilyās Shāhīs, the broad administrative divisions remained the same with only slight adjustments. Thus we can distinguish five distinct administrative divisions or provinces of the Bengal Sultānat. These were the north-western or Bihar province, the northern or royal province with Malda-Dinajpur districts as its heartland; the eastern province with Dacca-Mymensingh districts as its heartland; the southern province with Fathābād (Faridpur) and Khilāfatābād (Bagerhat) as its heartland, and the western province with Sātgaon

(Hugli) and Burdwan as its heartland.

Bihar was a full-fledged province of the Bengal Sultānat almost from the beginning. Thus during the reign of Rukn al-Dīn Kaikā'ūs (690-701/1291-1301) we find Fīrūz Aitigīn al-Sultānī as governor there.¹ He administered the province till at least 695/1296 and had under him Diyā' al-Dīn Ulugh Khān as Deputy-Governor.² Fīrūz Aitigīn was a very powerful governor and was decorated with such high-sounding titles as "the Great Khān and the Exalted Khāqān", "the Choice of Truth and Religion", "the Khān of the East and of China" and "the Second Alexander" etc.³ It has sometimes been suggested that it was this Fīrūz Aitigīn of Bihar who subsequently became the Sultān of Bengal and succeeded Kāikā'ūs under the name of Shams al-Dīn Fīrūz Shāh.⁴ Be that as it may, Fīrūz Shāh's son Hātim Khān was governor in Bihar at least during 709-715/1309-1315, with one Muḥammad Ḥasan Bektrurī as Deputy-Governor.⁵ Almost at the other end of the period we find during the reign of 'Alā' al-Dīn Ḥusain Shāh his son Prince Dāniyāl as the governor over the territory in 903/1497-98.⁶

In north Bengal we find earlier in the period the powerful governor Zafar Khān Bahrām Aitigīn posted at Deokot (in Dinajpur district) in 697/1297.⁷ He also bore high-sounding titles including the "Lion of Lions" and the "Second Alexander". In the following year he is found transferred to the province of west Bengal having his headquarters at Tribeni (near Hugli).⁸ There he continued to stay till at least 713/1313⁹ or most probably till his death as his tomb there clearly indicates. The similarity of his name (Bahrām Aitigīn) with that of his contemporary governor

¹ Bihar (Maheswar) inscription of Kaikā'ūs dated Muḥarram 692/1292-93, Dani, *Bibliography*, No. 4.

² Lakhisarai inscription of Kaikā'ūs dated 695/1296, *ibid.*, No.5.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Supra.*, 108; also *E.I.M.*, 1917-18, p.12.

⁵ Bihar (Hātim Khān's Palace) inscription of Fīrūz Shāh dated 709, and his Bihar (Choti Dargah) inscription dated 715, Dani, *op.cit.*, Nos. 10&12.

⁶ Monghyr inscription of 'Alā' al-Dīn Ḥusain Shāh dated 903/1497-98, *ibid.*, No. 78.

⁷ Deokot inscription of Kāikā'ūs dated Muḥarram 697/Oct. 1297, *ibid.*, No.6.

⁸ Tribeni (Zafar Khān's Mosque) inscription of the time of Kāikā'ūs dated 698/1298 *ibid.*, No.7.

⁹ Tribeni (Zafar Khān's tomb) inscription of the time of Shams al-Dīn Fīrūz Shāh dated 1 Muḥarram 713/28 April 1313, *ibid.*, No.11.

of Bihar (Fīrūz Aitigīn) "may lead to the conclusion that they were brothers and governed the western half of the kingdom, Fīrūz Aitigīn ruling the westernmost districts, Monghyr etc., and Bahram the territory on the east of them, Dinajpur, Tribeni, etc.",¹

The provinces of northern and western Bengal continued to be governed by efficient and dignified governors throughout the period. Thus towards the end of Maḥmūd Shāh's reign (846-864/1442-1459) his son Prince Bārbak Shāh was governor in west Bengal in 860/1455,² while the "Great Khān Iqrār Khān" acted as his deputy there. The latter's official position then was *Jāmdār Ghair Maḥallī* (Superintendent of the Royal Wardrobe outside the Palace) and Commander of the army (*Sar-i-Lashkar*) and Minister (*Wazīr*) in charge of the territory (*'arṣah*) of Sajlah-Mankhābād and the town (*shahr*) of Laobla. The territory of Sajlah-Mankhābād has been uniformly identified by scholars as the Hugli-Burdwan region, while the town of Laobla was situated in the 24-Parganas district about 10 miles to the east of Tribeni.³ This means that the province of west Bengal then included parts of the present district of 24-Parganas. When Bārbak Shāh had become Sultān, Iqrār Khān was transferred to the province of north Bengal as its governor with the additional title of *Pahlavī al-'aṣr wa al-zamān* (Hero of the period and time). He had then under him at least two officers named Ulugh Nuṣrat Khān and Khān-i-A'zam Ashraf Khān.⁴ The latter's specific official position is not mentioned in the inscription, but the former (Nuṣrat Khān) is described as *Jangdār* (officer in charge of the regiment) and *Shiqdār* (executive officer) of the "affairs of Jor and Baror and

¹ G. Yazdani in *E.I.M.*, 1917-1918, 12.

² Tribeni (Zafar Khān's Mosque) inscription of Bārbak Shāh dated 860/1455, Dani, *Bibliography*, No. 29. As Bārbak's father Maḥmūd Shāh is definitely known to have ruled till 864/1459, Blochmann, who first noticed the inscription (*J.A.S.B.*, 1870, 290 and 1873, 273n.) pointed out that Bārbak Shāh was at Tribeni as governor of that region, and styled himself as *Malik* and not as *Sultān*. The term *Malik* often means "Prince" or even "a high officer" (See *E.I.M.*, 1913-1914, 46). Subsequent scholars have generally accepted Blochmann's conclusion. "The text of the epigraph further shows", writes Ahmed, "that Barbak was not a rebel at that time as he did not use any lofty title of an independent ruler such as 'Sultan' or the like". (*Inscriptions*, 69).

³ See for instance Ahmed, *op.cit.*, 69-70.

⁴ The two Dinajpur (Mahisantosh) inscriptions of Bārbak Shāh dated respectively 865/1460 and 16 Šafar 865/1 Dec. 1460, Dani, *Bibliography*, Nos. 32 and 33.

other *Mahallahs*". Baror has been generally identified with the locality (*pargana*) of the same name in Purnia district. The location of Jor has not been clearly identified; but this and the other *mahallahs* referred to in the inscription must have been adjacent places. It is clear, however, that Iqrār Khān's charge at that time included part of the Purnia district in the west. He continued to administer the region till at least 876/1471-1472 in which year he is mentioned in another inscription as holding also the rank of *wazīr* in charge of the "famous town of Bārbakabād" (Mahisantosh, Dinajpur).¹

In west Bengal Iqrār Khān's successor was most probably Khān-i-A'zam Tarbiyat Khān who is mentioned in an inscription of 861/1456 erecting a mosque at Sātgaon (Hugli).² His full titles are not given in the record, but "he seems to have been the governor of West Bengal whose seat of government was at Satgaon."³ About a quarter of a century afterwards we find there as governor Ulugh Majlis Nūr whose full titles are given in the record.⁴ Like his predecessor Iqrār Khān, Ulugh Majlis Nūr was also the commander (*Sar-i-Lashkar*) and *wazīr* of the territory of Sajla Mankhābād and of the "famous town of Simlabād", and also commander of the *thāna* (military post or cantonment) of Laobla and Mihirbak and the territory of Hādīgar.⁵ Simlabad has been identified with Salimbād, a few miles south-east of Burdwan, while Hādīgar has been identified with the Hathigar *pargana* of the 24-Parganas district. Still later on, during the reign of 'Alā' al-Dīn Husain Shāh we find the names of two other governors of west Bengal, Ulugh Hindhu Khān and Rukn al-Dīn Rukn Khān ibn 'Alā' al-Dīn al-Sarhatī, bearing the same official designations of *wazīr* and *Sar-i-Lashkar* etc. of the same places as mentioned in connection with Iqrār Khān and Ulugh Majlis Nūr with the only change that "the famous town of Simlabād" is now substituted for

¹ Mahisantosh inscription of Bārbak Shāh dated 876/1471-72, *ibid.*, No. 42.

² Sātgaon inscription of the time of Mahmūd Shāh dated 861/1456, *ibid.*, No. 23; Ahmed, *Inscriptions*, 56-57.

³ *Ibid.*, 57.

⁴ Sātgaon Inscription of the time of Fath Shāh dated 4 Muharram 892/1 January 1487, Dani, *Bibliography*, No. 60.

⁵ *Ibid.* The expression runs as follows: *Sar-i-Lashkar wa Wazir 'Arsah Sajlah Mankhabad wa Shahr Mashhur Simlabad wa Sar-i-Lashkar Thana Laobla wa Mihirbak 'Arsah wa Mahal Hadigar.*

"the famous town of Husinabād Buzurg",¹ which must have been situated within the "Arṣah of Sajla Mankhābād".² By the year 918/1512 the same Rukn Khān appears to have been transferred to the province of north Bengal.³

¹ Three Tribeni (Zafar Khan's Mosque) inscriptions of the time of 'Alā' al-Dīn Husam Shāh dated 1 Rajab 911/31 October 1505, 912/1506 and one undated. *Dani, Bibliography*, Nos. 93, 94 and 120.

The earliest of the inscriptions so far discovered of 'Alā' al-Dīn Husam Shāh has been found at Depara in the *sadr* sub-division of the Hughli district. It is dated Jamādī II 899/March 1494. It records the construction of a mosque there by *Majlis al-Majālis Majlis Barbak* (*E. I. Ar. & Pers. Suppl.*, 1965, 23-24). "Like many of his illustrious predecessors and contemporaries", writes M. I. Khan who first published the inscription, "Majlisu'l-Majālis Barbak is not known from available historical works. But, in an inscription, dated A.H. 918 (1512 A.D.), from Kalna in Burdwan district, which is also being studied in this article (Inscription No. III), we have one Majlis Barbak as the governor. It is quite likely that Majlis Barbak of both these records is one and the same person, in which case it may be safely presumed that he enjoyed that highest office in the region which included both Kalna and Depara (distance between the two being about fifteen kilometres) from A.H. 899 to A.H. 918, the dates of the two epigraphs, with or without interruptions." (*ibid.*, 24).

In view of the facts contained in the three Tribeni inscriptions referred to above, it may be pointed out that Majlis Barbak must have served in the region either as deputies of Hindu Khān and Rukn Khān, or, likelier still, with interruptions, being transferred from that region during the incumbency of the latter two governors.

² *Dani, Bibliography*, p. 64.

³ Deokot inscription of the time of 'Alā' al-Dīn Husam Shāh dated 918/1512. *Dani, Bibliography*, No. 105. It may be noted that Rukn Khān is mentioned in three inscriptions of the ruler. In the Deokot inscription of 918 he is mentioned as "Rukn Khān 'Alā' al-Dīn al-Sarhatī", while in the Sylhet inscription of the same date (*Dani*, No. 108) he is simply called Rukn Khān, with the additional information that "being Wazir and Commander of the Towns, at the time of the conquest of Kamrū, Kāmtā, Jajnagar and Orissa", he served "in the army in several places in the train of the king". Again in the undated Tribeni inscription mentioned above he is mentioned as "Rukn al-Dīn Rukn Khān ibn 'Alā' al-Dīn al-Sarhatī". In all these three inscriptions the principal name is Rukn Khān. The main difference between the first and the third inscription is that in the latter the word 'son of' (*ibn*) is inserted between "Rukn Khān" and "'Alā' al-Dīn". While noticing these inscriptions for the first time Blochmann took all the three to be one and the same person. Subsequently Dr. G. Yazdani (*E. I. M.*, 1929-30, 12-13) distinguished between them and held that Rukn Khān of the third inscription was the son of the Rukn Khān of the first inscription. Dr. Dani, in his *Bibliography* seems to have adopted both the views. Thus while commenting on the Deokot inscription (p. 57) he states: "It seems the word *bin* (son of) between Rukn Khān and Alauddin is missing from the inscription. If so the reference is to one man only". Then, in connection with the Tribeni inscription Dani states (p. 64): "Here the name is clearly Rukn al-Dīn Rukn Khān. He is mentioned as the son of (Rukn Khān) Alauddin. The official and honorific titles of the two fundamentally differ. Hence we must accept the views of Yazdani and make two Rukn Khāns; one the father with the name 'Alauddin Rukn Khān, and the other son with the name Ruknuddin Rukn Khān." It is necessary to point out that Dr. Dani seems to have changed the order of the names to fit in with the conclusion. The name in the Tribeni inscription is of course Rukn al-Dīn Rukn Khān, but he is described as *ibn 'Alā' al-Dīn al-Sarhatī*. Nor was the supposed father's name 'Alauddin Rukn Khān', as Dani puts it, but Rukn Khān 'Alā' al-Dīn al-Sarhatī. The difference is important; for if the principal name was Rukn al-Dīn, and if his father was Rukn Khān 'Alā' al-Dīn, the expression must have been "Rukn al-Dīn ibn Rukn Khān 'Alā' al-Dīn al-Sarhatī". But the expressions in the Deokot and the Tribeni inscriptions are simply: "Rukn Khān 'Alā' al-Dīn al-Sarhatī" and "Rukn al-Dīn Rukn Khān ibn 'Alā' al-Dīn al-Sarhatī." Clearly the principal name in both the records is Rukn Khān, "Rukn al-Dīn" being only an honorific title added in the second

The provinces of Eastern and Southern Bengal were likewise administered by governors having the rank and title of *wazir*. One of its important governors was Khwāja Jahān who is mentioned in a Dacca record dated 20 Sha'bān 863/13 June 1459 as rebuilding a gate "within the boundary of Iqlim Mubārakabād."¹ The name Mubārakabād is thought to be reminiscent of the first independent ruler of Eastern Bengal, Fakhr al-Dīn Mubārak. A relic of the *Iqlīm* (province or division), very plausibly points out Stapleton, "seems to be the locality of Mubarak Ujial which still exists as a large pargana of the Dacca district, comprising much of the land south-west and west of Dacca town between the Padma on the south and the Dhaleswari on the north."² Another notable governor, holding charge of the province was Khān Mu'azzam Khurshid Khān. In 868/1463 he is found erecting a mosque in Sylhet and holding at that time the official designation of *Maḥaliyan-i-Nawbat 'Āli* (Chief of the Guard of the Royal Household);³ and in the following year he erected another mosque at Dacca on the inscription of which he is described as *Nawbat-i-Ghair Maḥaliyān* (Chief of the Guard of the Royal Household outside the Palace).⁴ It would seem that in 868/1463 he was first transferred from court, where he held the high post of the Chief of the Guard of the Royal Household, to the eastern province which included within its jurisdiction both Sylhet and Dacca, and that by the time he settled himself at the latter place his status was redesignated as "Chief of the Guard of the Royal Household outside the Palace".⁵ That Sylhet and Dacca formed

record. Leaving aside this honorific title the names would read as "Rukn Khān ibn 'Alā' al-Dīn al-Sarhatī" and "Rukn Khān 'Alā' al-Dīn al-Sarhatī". It is a common practice among Arabic speaking peoples often to drop the word "ibn" from their names. Thus Blochmann's conclusion of the three Rukn Khāns being one and the same person appears reasonable.

¹ Dacca (Naswalagali) inscription of the time of Nāṣir al-Dīn Maḥmūd Shāh, dated 20 Sha'bān 863/13 June 1459, Dani, *Bibliography*, No. 27; Ahmed, *Inscriptions*, 62-64.

² *J.A.S.B.*, New Series, Vol. VI., 147.

³ Hatkhola (Sylhet district) inscription of the time of Bārbak Shāh dated 5 Ṣafar 868/19 Oct. 1463, Dani, *Bibliography*, No. 34.

⁴ Peril (Dacca district) inscription of the time of Bārbak Shāh dated 5 Shawwāl 869/1 May 1465, *Ibid.*, No. 36.

⁵ Khān Mu'azzam Khurshid Khān served the Bengal Sultanat for a long time and is found constructing a *Jāmi'* mosque at Gaud as late as 898/1492 (Malda district inscription of the time of Muzaḥḥar Shāh, dated 10 Rabī'ī 898/1492-93, *ibid.*, No. 71). During 'Alā' al-Dīn Husain Shāh's time a *Jāmi'* mosque was erected for the benefit of Khurshid Khān's departed soul (Murshidabad district inscription of 'Alā' al-Dīn Husain Shāh, dated 909/1503, *ibid.*, No. 87).

parts of the same province in the east is definitely shown by a record of the time of Fath Shāh wherein one Muqarrab al-Daulah...al-Dīn Sultānī appears to be governor of the region in 889/1484 holding the designation of "Superintendent of the Royal Wardrobe outside the Palace" (*Jāmdār Ghair Maḥallī*) and commander (*Sar-i-Lashkar*) and minister (*wazīr*) of the *Iqlīm* of Mu'azzamabād, "also known as Mahmūdabād", and commander (*Sar-i-Lashkar*) of Thāna Laud.¹ Laud or Laur lies in north-western Sylhet on the foot of the hills, whereas *Iqlīm* Mu'azzamabād has been definitely identified with the Dacca-Mymensingh region.² The same limit of the province is suggested by a record of the time of 'Alā' al-Dīn Husain Shāh found in Sylhet. In it Khālīs Khān appears as the governor in 911/1505 with the same official rank and designation, namely, *Jāmdār Ghair Maḥallī* and commander and *wazīr* of *Iqlīm* Mu'azzamabād.³ His successor as governor there was Khān al-A'zam Khwāṣ Khān who is mentioned in 919 as "Commander of the land of Tripura (*Sar-i-Lashkar Zamīn Tripura*)" and *wazīr* of *Iqlīm* Mu'azzamabād.⁴ Clearly Tripura was by then added to the charge of the eastern governor. Still later on we find Taqī al-Dīn, son of 'Ain al-Dīn, posted at Sunārgāon.⁵ Taqī al-Dīn is not explicitly mentioned in connection with the *Iqlīm* of Mu'azzamabād etc., but he is described as the "Lord of the nobles and *Wazīrs*" (*Malik al-'Umarā' wa al-Wuzarā'*), a rank which would not in any case justify us in assigning him a post lower than that of the governor who, as already noticed, was always only a *wazīr*.

The southern province comprised the districts lying to the south of the Ganges, and bounded on the east by the province of Mu'azzamabād-Mubārakabād and, on the west, by the province of Sajlā-Mankhābād-Hādīgar. Its most well-known governor was Khān al-A'zam Khān Jahān who had his headquarters at Khalīfat-

¹ Sunārgāon (Mugrapara) inscription of the time of Fath Shāh, dated 889/1484, *ibid.*, No. 57.

² Blochmann in *J.A.S.B.*, 1873, 235-36.

³ Sylhet inscription of the time of 'Alā' al-Dīn Husain Shāh dated 911/1505, Dani, *Bibliography*, No. 92; Ahmed, *Inscriptions*, 169-70.

⁴ Sunārgāon inscription of the time of 'Alā' al-Dīn Husain Shāh dated 2 Rabi' II, 919/7 June 1513, Dani, *op.cit.*, No. 109, Ahmed, *op.cit.*, 192-193.

⁵ Sunārgāon inscription of the time of Nusrat Shāh dated 929/1523, Dani, *op.cit.*, No. 124; Ahmed, *op.cit.*, 209-210.

ābād (Bagerhat).¹ He was a contemporary of the Mubārakabād (Dacca) governor Khwāja Jahān, and was in fact responsible for bringing the greater portion of southern Khulna and Barisal districts under settlement by clearing the forests. He is also believed to have given the name Khalīfatabād to his Sundarban settlement in honour of Sulṭān Nāṣir al-Dīn Maḥmūd I who especially authorized him to reclaim the southern lands. Towards the end of the period we find the mention of another governor, Khān Mu'azzam Mubārak Khān during whose time one Miyān Mu'azzam, a *Jangdār*, constructed a mosque at Navagram in the Pabna district in 932/1526.²

Thus the territory of the Bengal Sulṭanat was divided into five main provinces which may be generally demarcated as Bihar, north Bengal, east Bengal (including Sylhet), south Bengal and west Bengal. The position of the extreme south-eastern region now forming the districts of Noakhail and Chittagong is not clear. It formed a part of the Bengal Sulṭanat as early as the time of Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad Shāh (817-835/1414-1431), for he issued coins from the Chittagong mint.³ We also find mention of 'Alā' al-Dīn Husain Shāh's governors at Chittagong in the Bengali literature and other sources. Whether the territory passed hands during the intervening period is not definitely known. Whatever the position, it appears to have been treated as a distinct administrative division.

Many of the governors whose names have come down to us were *Sar-i-Lashkars* or commanders of the armed forces stationed in their respective jurisdictions. Some of them like Zafar Khān Bahrām Aitigīn and Rukn Khān 'Alā' al-Dīn al-Sarhatī were capable generals. While these facts indicate that there was no rigid distinction between civil and military cadres of the services and that the governors were generally responsible for the defence of the areas under their respective charges, it would not be correct to assume that they were "military governors" or that their

¹ Bagerhat inscription of the time of Nāṣir al-Dīn Maḥmūd Shāh dated 26 Dhu al-Hijja, 863/1458-59, Dani, *op.cit.*, No. 28.

² Navagram (Pabna district) inscription of the time of Nuṣrat Shāh, dated 4 Rajab, 932/21 April 1526, *ibid.*, No. 130.

³ *Catalogue*, II, 163.

administration was akin to the "rule of the major-generals". Their status and qualifications as stated in the records clearly mark them out as civil dignitaries. This is probably also emphasized by their designation as *wazīrs*. In any case there is no doubt that they held their charges for a term of years. There are clear instances of their being transferred from one province to another, as was the case with Zafar Khān, Rukn Khān, Iqrār Khān and others. This at least militates against the unwarranted assumption made first by Charles Stewart and adopted subsequently by others¹ that the administration of the Bengal Sultānat was "feudal" in nature and the various officers and administrators held their respective areas in "fiefs". Nothing could be farther from the truth. The assumption is generally based on Ikhtiyār al-Dīn Muḥammad bin Bakhtiyār Khaljī's division of his dominion into three parts and assigning them to the three of his principal lieutenants; but it is worth remembering that even those three lieutenants of his did not establish themselves as "feudal lords" in their respective territories, but left their posts immediately on the former's death and entered the struggle for succession in which they either rose or fell. Far from being feudal lords, the governors of the Bengal Sultānat were merely the superiors of a hierarchy of officials. We have, besides the names of a few deputy-governors, those of some others holding the posts of *Jangdār*, *Shiqdār* and *Kar-Farmān*.² There were undoubtedly many others in charge of the different aspects of administration.

Such a hierarchy is also suggested by the names of a number of smaller units into which the main administrative division or province was divided. From historical texts as well as from coins and inscriptions we have the following terms applied to different places :

' <i>Arṣah</i>	—	Bangālah, mentioned by Baranī
		Chātgaon, mentioned in coins
		Chāwalistān 'urf Kāmṛū, mentioned in coins
		Sātgaon, mentioned in coins
		Shahri-Naw, mentioned in coins

¹ For instance K.R. Qanungo in *H.B.* II, 42, 75-76.; Tarafdar, *op.cit.*, 98.

² See for instance the Deotala inscription of Nuṣrat Shāh, dated 934/1528, Dani, *Bibliography*, No. 134.

<i>Iqlīm</i>	—	Bangālah, mentioned by Barānī Lakhnawatī, mentioned by Barānī Mu'zzamābād, mentioned in both coins and inscriptions Mubārakābād, mentioned only in inscriptions
<i>Khittah</i>	—	Lakhnawatī, mentioned in coins,
<i>Maḥal</i>	—	Baror, mentioned in inscriptions Hādīgar, mentioned in inscriptions Jor, mentioned in inscriptions
<i>Qaṣbah</i>	—	Lakhnawatī, mentioned in coins, Dacca, mentioned in coins Tabrizābād, (Deotala), mentioned in coins
<i>Shahr</i>	—	Lakhnawatī, mentioned in coins, Laobla, mentioned in inscriptions Muzaffarābād, mentioned in inscriptions Mahmūdābād, mentioned in inscriptions Muhammadābād, mentioned in inscriptions Hādīgar, mentioned in inscriptions Husainābād, mentioned in inscriptions Bārbakābād, mentioned in inscriptions Firūzābād, mentioned in inscriptions Simlābād, mentioned in inscriptions
<i>Thāna</i>	—	Laobla, mentioned in inscriptions Laod, mentioned in inscriptions
<i>Zamīn</i>	—	Tripura, mentioned in inscriptions

Some of these terms might have been mere geographical expressions, but most of them appear to have administrative connotations. Unfortunately it is not possible to define their exact nature and extent. A number of places appear under various designations. For instance Lakhnawatī has been mentioned as an *Iqlīm*, a *Shahr*, a *Khittah* and a *Qaṣbah*; and Hādīgar, as an *'Arṣah*, a *Maḥal* and a *Qaṣbah*. It is reasonable to suggest that these expressions refer to different kinds of units having a particular place as their centre. Thus it might be said that while *Shahr* Lakhnawatī meant in general the city of Lakhnawatī, *Qaṣbah* Lakhnawatī probably referred to its citadel or metropolitan part, and *Khittah* and *Iqlīm* of Lakhnawatī most probably meant respectively the district and division of Lakhnawatī.¹

¹ In modern parlance *Iqlīm* means area, region, province, etc., *Qaṣbah* means, citadel, capital city, etc., and *Khittah* means a piece of land or a district, etc. With reference to the Delhi Sultanat Dr. I.H. Qureshi interprets the term *Qaṣbah* and *Khittah* respectively as an unfortified city and a fortified one. (Qureshi, *op.cit.*, 203n7).

Maḥal was clearly a smaller administrative division, while the *Thāna* was a military station or cantonment.¹ *Zamīn* was in all likelihood used in its geographical sense of 'land'. The two largest units were obviously '*Arṣah*'² and *Iqlīm*, though the way Barānī uses the terms is rather confusing. Thus he calls *Bangālah*, which then meant east Bengal generally, both *Iqlīm* and '*Arṣah*'. It has been suggested that Barānī's context would indicate that his '*Arṣah*' applied "to only that portion of *Bangālah* which was already conquered, whereas his *Iqlīm* *Bangālah* was the vast territory of *Bangālah* that was yet to be conquered."³ But Barānī's mention of *Lakhnawatī*, which was already the capital of the Muslim dominion, as an *Iqlīm* contradicts such an assumption. This very fact also nullifies the suggestion that the use of the term *Iqlīm* was confined to eastern Bengal.⁴ The only inference which can be drawn from the available information is that an '*Arṣah*' was somewhat smaller in size than an *Iqlīm*. That both '*Arṣah*' and *Iqlīm* are mentioned along with other units like *Thāna*, *Shahr*, *Maḥal*, etc. as forming the charge of a particular governor goes to show that neither '*Arṣah*' nor *Iqlīm* can be taken to mean the entire administrative charge of the governor, or "province", as indicated in the present discussion.

V: SOURCES OF THE REVENUE

The revenue of the Bengal Sultanat was derived mainly from *kharāj* or land tax and, to a certain extent, from customs and other taxes. During the earlier phase of conquest and expansion we find the mention of *ghanīma* or booty captured after successful expeditions. For instance Muḥammad bin Bakhtiyār Khaljī is stated to have captured a vast amount of *ghanīma* after his conquest of Nadia.⁵ Similarly Ghiyāth al-Dīn 'Iwāḍ Khaljī, Muḥīth al-Dīn Ṭughral and Shams al-Dīn Ilyās Shāh are each stated to have obtained a good amount of booty including elephants from such places as the kingdom of Jāznagar (Orissa),

¹ At present the term *Thāna* is applied to both the police station and the part of the administrative district under its jurisdiction.

² The modern meanings of the word '*Arṣah*' are a vacant lot, a courtyard, etc.

³ A. Karim, "Aspects of Muslim administration etc.", *op.cit.*, 89.

⁴ Dani, quoted in *ibid.*, 87, 88.

⁵ *Minhāj*, I, 560.

Tirhut, Kāmrūp and Bang (east Bengal). Subsequent rulers, whenever they undertook a successful expedition against a neighbouring territory might also have captured whatever booty they found in the conquered territory. Such income was however by its very nature only occasional; it could never have been a regular source of revenue, and it definitely ceased to exist with the process of consolidation of the Muslim dominion and the growth of a regular system of administration. Even when such booty was gathered, it had to be divided according to Islamic law between the state and the soldiery, the former's share being one-fifth, and the latter's four-fifths of the total. Whether this rule was strictly followed by the Muslim rulers in Bengal is not definitely known; but we have at least one reference to the soldiers' discontent on account of their being deprived of their due share of the booty by Muḥammad bin Tughlaq's governor at Sunārgāon, Qadr Khān, which act was in a large measure responsible for his easy overthrow by his adversary Fakhr al-Dīn.¹

By far the most important and regular source of revenue was *kharāj* or land-revenue. When the Muslims conquered the country they left the local population in free enjoyment of their land and property in lieu of their paying *kharāj*. There is no indication in the sources of the imposition of the *jizya* (poll-tax) on the conquered population of Bengal, although, significantly enough, it is found in existence in northern India at least during the early years of Akbar's reign.² One explanation of the non-existence of the *jizya* in Bengal might be that the idea of *kharāj* itself had by that time undergone a change. Originally a tax payable by the conquered and non-Muslim population for their lands, it came to be regarded subsequently as a substitute for *jizya* and, still later on, it was realized as a regular land-tax from both Muslim and non-Muslim population.³ The Muslim rulers in Bengal seem to have understood *kharāj* in this last sense, and realized it from Muslim and non-Muslim inhabitants alike. Thus while we hear of Hindu land-owners (*Raees*) sending *kharāj* to the state treasury, we

¹ *H.B.*, II, 98. See also *supra*, pp. 120-121.

² Akbar abolished *jizya* in his state in the 9th year of his reign.

³ See *Dā'irat al-Ma'ārif al-Islāmi* (Arabic text), Vol. VIII, 280-281.

find it also being realized on the basis of territorial divisions irrespective of the religious beliefs of the inhabitants. For instance Sultān Fakhar al-Dīn Mubārak Shāh realized *kharāj* from the outskirts of Sunārgāon;¹ while Sultān Fīrūz Shāh Tughlaq of Delhi proclaimed a general remission of *kharāj* in course of his expedition against Lakhnawati in order to win the support of the land-owners in general.² Some of the rulers even issued special coins out of the *kharāj* of specific territories. For instance, Sultān Mughīth al-Dīn Yūzbak issued coins from the *kharāj* of Nadia and Burdwan,³ and Sultān Rukn al-Dīn Kāikā'ūs issued coins out of the *kharāj* of Bang (east Bengal).⁴

The rate of *kharāj* and the mode of its payment probably varied from time to time and from place to place. Ibn Baṭūṭa states that the cultivators on both sides of the "blue river" (the Meghna) through which he passed in course of his journey from Sunārgāon to Sylhet and back used to give half of their crops to the government.⁵ On the other hand the Chinese visitors during the early 15th century noted that the revenue was one-fifth of the produce.⁶ Again Ibn Baṭūṭa's statement suggests that payment was made in kind; but Abū al-Faḍl, speaking about the pre-Mughal period states that the people of Bengal paid their yearly rents in cash by eight monthly instalments, "they themselves bringing mohars and rupees to the appointed place" for payment and that the system of division of grain between the government and the husbandman was not customary there. He further states that harvests being always abundant, measurement of land was not "insisted upon" and the revenue demands were "determined by estimate of the crops".⁷ It may be noted that in north India both the systems of cash and crop payments were in use, and this might have been the case in Bengal also. That payment by cash was definitely in vogue is suggested by the fact that coins were

¹ Shams-i-Siraj-i 'Alif, *Tārīkh-i-Fīrūz Shāhi*, Bib. Ind. edn., 1890, 138.

² Firishṭa, *op. cit.*, 297.

³ *Catalogue*, II, 146, No. 6, and Plate I, No. 6. The coin is dated 653 H. and on the margin of its reverse is inscribed: هذه الضرب يلكون من خراج ارض بدن ونوديا في رمضان سنة ثلث وخمسين وستماية.

⁴ *J. A. S. B.*, 1922, 410.

⁵ *Supra*, p. 129.

⁶ Chinese Accounts, *op. cit.*, *Visva Bhāratī Annals*, 99.

⁷ *Āin*, II (tr.) 134.

minted from a number of places, probably from each of the provinces, and as such coins must have been in general circulation. Abū al-Faḍl's statement about the system of cash payment and of non-insistence on the measurement of lands is also substantially confirmed by the sixteenth century Bengali poet Mukundarām. He states that when Akbar's general Mānsingh came to Bengal as viceroy he sent his officers to the poet's locality (west Bengal) to make a reassessment of the land revenue by measuring the lands. This caused great hardships to the people who were not used to such measures. The officers measured the lands, writes the poet, "by placing ropes on the angular sides of the fields, and they measured 15 *cottahs* to a *bighā*.¹ They disregarded the cries of the rayats. They came to be the death of many people, and they entered unculturable lands as culturable."² The poet further informs us that for procuring money for the payment of the revenue the *ra'yats* began to sell their cattle and household articles even at a discount: "articles worth a rupee sold for ten annas".³ Even they had to borrow at high interest money from the *Poddārs* who thus became virtual angel of death (*Jam*) for the people. "For every rupee they gave you 2½ annas less, while they took for themselves as interest one pie per day per rupee."⁴ Abū al-Faḍl's other statement about direct payment by the people to revenue collecting officials also appears to be in consonance with the information obtainable from other sources. That there was an elaborate machinery for the realization of the revenue is clear enough. We find in an inscription the mention of an officer called *Sar-i-Gomastah* (principal revenue collector).⁵ He must have under him other officers in the department. Poet Mukundarām makes mention of a *dihidār* which term in all likelihood means the village revenue collector. Even Mukundarām's *Poddār* seems to be both a revenue-collecting agent and a

¹ According to general practice, which is still in vogue in Bengal, 20 *Cottahs* (*Kāthās*) make up a *Bighā* which is approximately 1600 square yards.

² Mukundarām, quoted and translated in J.N. Das Gupta, *Bengal in the Sixteenth Century A.D.*, University of Calcutta, 1914, 62.

³ That is 5/8ths of a rupee, 16 *annas* making a rupee.

⁴ J.N. Das Gupta, *op.cit.*, 62, 63. One *pie* was equivalent to 1/64th of a rupee.

⁵ Bara inscription of Bārbak Shāh, dated 1 Jamādī I, 864/23 Feb. 1459.

money-lender.¹ Towards the end of the period under review, particularly during the Husain Shāhī period, however, there appears to have come into existence a group of revenue collecting agents referred to as *Tālukdārs* and *Majmu'adārs*. The Vaishnava literature of the time makes mention of Hiranya Dās, Gopināth and Rāmchandra Khān as such revenue contractors.² They were not however *zamindars* in the modern sense of the term, and their right was in no way hereditary. Both Gopināth and Rāmchandra Khān were ousted, arrested and punished for their being defaulters and oppressive upon the people. Nor was there any system of *jāgīrs* in Bengal during the Sultānat period.³

Besides *kharāj* customs constituted an important source of the revenue, especially later in the period. According to the Chinese account customs duties were realized at the sea-port of Chittagong.⁴ Duarte Barbosa informs us that there were many towns "both up the country and on the coast" where customs officials were appointed to realize the revenue.⁵ The Portuguese sources tell us that Sultān Maḥmūd Shāh III granted the Portuguese the privilege of collecting customs at Sātgaon and Chittagong and also to build factories at those places and to realize revenues from the adjoining areas.⁶ We have no idea however of the size of the customs revenue, nor of the specific items of merchandize on which customs were collected. From Bengali literature it appears that there were some restrictions on the movement of valuable commodities like *chandan* (sandal wood) between Bengal and Orissa.⁷

VI: ARMY AND DEFENCE

Unlike the feudal levies of medieval Europe or the semi-feudal levies of the Mughal *manṣabdārs*, the Bengal Sultāns had a standing army under them. The Sultān himself was the supreme commander of the armed forces and led expeditions whenever he

¹ J.N. Das Gupta, *op.cit.*, 73.

² *Chaitanya Charitāmrita*, quoted in *ibid.*, 33,71,72.

³ See Tarafdar, *op.cit.* 110-111.

⁴ *Viśva Bhāratī Annals*, *op.cit.*, 120.

⁵ *The Book of Duarte Barbosa*, Vol.II, Eng.tr., Hukluyt Society, London, 1921, 148.

⁶ Campos, *op.cit.*, 39,46.

⁷ *Chaitanya Bhāgavat*, quoted in Karim, *op.cit.*, 92.

thought it proper to do so. Besides Ikhtiyār al-Dīn Muḥammad bin Bakhtiyār Khaljī a number of the Bengal Sultāns like Ilyās Shāh, Fīrūz Shāh and 'Alā' al-Dīn Husain Shāh were great generals themselves. The Sultān had, however, a number of commanders employed under him and placed in charge of specific contingents or campaigns. Of such commanders and generals mention may be made of Zafar Khān Bahrām Aitigīn and Sikandar Khān Ghāzī, the conqueror of Sylhet during the reign of Sultān Shams al-Dīn Fīrūz Shāh, Shāh Ismā'īl Ghāzī during the reign of Sultān Rukn al-Dīn Bārbak Shāh and Rukn Khān, the conqueror of Kāmta, Kāmrūp and Orissa under Sultān 'Alā' al-Dīn Husain Shāh. Sometimes princes were appointed to lead expeditions. For instance 'Alā' al-Dīn Husain Shāh had appointed Prince Nuṣrat Shāh (later on Sultān Nusrat Shāh) and Prince Dāniyāl to lead the expeditions respectively to Chittagong and Kāmrūp. As already mentioned, there was no strict distinction between the civil and military departments, and often governors of the provinces were made commanders (*Sar-i-Lashkar*) of the armed forces stationed within their respective areas. There were however other *Sar-i-Lashkars* who were not governors, nor incumbents of any civil posts.

The size of the army naturally differed from time to time and in accordance with the needs and resources of individual Sultāns. At the height of his power Ikhtiyār al-Dīn Muḥammad bin Bakhtiyār Khaljī appears to have at least 15 to 20 thousand cavalry under him. It is well known that he led his Tībet expedition at the head of some 10 thousand Turkish cavalymen. At that time he must have left behind almost an equal number with his three lieutenants placed in charge of the three regions of his newly established dominion in Bengal. Sultān Shams-al-Dīn Ilyās Shāh appears to be the first ruler to make local recruits for his army. It is stated that he met the Delhi ruler Fīrūz Shāh Tughlaq in battle with ten thousand cavalry, two hundred thousand infantry and fifty elephants.¹ According to another statement Ilyās Shāh had then under him, besides a huge infantry and a number of

¹ Shams-i-Siraj-i' Afīf, *Tarikh-i-Firūz Shāhī*, op. cit., 152-153.

elephants, a force of 90,000 cavalry.¹ This, if correct, was indeed a large number in relation to that age. At a later stage of the Sultanat, under 'Alā' al-Dīn Husain Shāh, the army is reported to be about "twentyfour thousand strong, ten thousand being cavalry, and the rest infantry, with four hundred war elephants."² This report comes from the Portuguese navigator Vasco da-Gama. Incidentally this agrees well with Shihāb al-Dīn Tālish's account according to which an army of 24,000 accompanied 'Alā' al-Dīn Husain Shah in his Assam expedition.³ Probably the report of this expedition somehow reached Vasco da-Gama so that he mentioned that specific number. Understandably, however, the whole army could not have been taken into Assam and 'Alā' al-Dīn Husain Shāh's total armed forces must have been almost double that number. In any case there seems to be a substantial increase in the number of the army during the time of his successor Sultān Nuṣrat Shāh. According to the Assamese sources the latter is said to have attacked Assam with 1,000 horse, one million men including the land and naval forces, a huge park of artillery and thirty elephants.⁴ One million is obviously an exaggerated figure, as are the numbers thirty and one thousand too small for elephants and cavalry. Dā'ūd Khān, the last Afghan ruler of Bengal, is reported to have had under him "40,000 well-mounted cavalry, and 33,000 elephants, and 140,000 infantry, consisting of musketeers, matchlockmen and rocketeers and archers, and 20,000 pieces of ordnance, most of which were battering guns, and many armed cruisers, and other implements of war."⁵

As is evident from the above, the armed forces were composed of the cavalry, the infantry (*pāiks*), the navy or flotilla of war-boats, an elephant corps and, at least later in the period, an artillery corps. The early conquerors were accompanied mainly by their cavalry force. Whether they had with them an infantry is not definitely known; but foot soldiers as such were not unknown

¹ *H.B.*, II., 108.

² Vasco da-Gama's report, quoted in Campos, *op.cit.*, 25.

³ *J.A.S.B.*, 1872, 79.

⁴ *Assam Buranjid*, G.C. Barua, 67-68, quoted in Tarafdar, *op.cit.*, 103,n.1.

⁵ *Riyād*, 154.

to them. The organization of an infantry called *pāiks* appears prominently for the first time in connection with Sultān Ilyās Shāh's confrontation with Sultān Fīrūz Shāh Tughlaq of Delhi.¹ Thereafter the *pāiks* are found from time to time playing important roles in battles as well as in court politics, especially in the later Ilyās Shāhī period. The cavalry and the infantry could, however, ensure the Bengal Sultān's hold only over the high land of north Bengal during the dry seasons; for the riverine tract of south and eastern Bengal and during the rainy season generally when the rivers in the northern part of the country also were swollen, he had of necessity to depend on a flotilla of war-boats. Sultān Ghiyāth al-Dīn 'Iwāḍ Khaljī was the first Muslim Bengal ruler to pay attention to this branch of the armed forces and to organize a flotilla of war-boats. About the same time an elephant corps in the Bengal Sultān's forces came into existence. Elephants were found rather in large numbers in north Bengal, Assam, the Sylhet and the Chittagong regions and also in the forest region of south-west Bengal. When the Delhi Sultān Iltutmish had led his expedition into Bengal, Ghiyāth al-Dīn 'Iwāḍ Khaljī attempted to pacify him by sending him thirty elephants as present.² From that time till the end of the Mughal rule both the flotilla of war-boats and the elephant corps remained two important arms of the Bengal military forces. These were quite new additions to the Muslim armed forces in Bengal necessitated by its geography and climate. While war-boats were chiefly employed in battles in south Bengal as well as in Assam during the rainy season, elephants were employed along with the cavalry in all expeditions during the dry season, but chiefly in warfares in Assam and south-west Bengal against the Orissa forces. Exactly at what period fire-arms were introduced in Bengal is not known; but the Mughal adventurer Bābur, whose remarkable success at the battle of Panipat (1526) is generally attributed to his effective use of fire arms for the first time in north India, himself found the Bengal artillery rather impressive.³ Joao De Barros also testifies to the

¹ Barāni, *Tārīkh-i-Fīrūz Shāhī*, Bib. Ind. edn., 1862, 593.

² *Minhāj*, pp. 163-64, 171.

³ *Bābur's Memoirs*, II, 672.

efficiency of the Bengal Sultān's artillery and mentions it as the main cause of his supremacy over the rulers of Arakan and Tippera.¹ The Assamese sources also refer to the effective artillery of the Bengal Sultān Nuṣrat Shāh and to his soldiers' "opening fire from their large guns and flint guns."²

Fire-arms were, however, relatively modern introduction. Prior to as well as along with these, the most common weapons of war consisted of sword (*tegh* and *shamshīr*), bow and arrow, dagger (*khanjar*), spear (*nezāh*) and shield.³ Care was taken to train the soldiery in the efficient use of these weapons; and it appears books on tactics, warfare, and the use of arms were provided for the purpose. It may be pointed out that the contemporary Mamlūk rulers of Egypt, with which country the Bengal Sultānat was in touch since Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad Shāh's time, were "avid readers of works on tactics and warfare."⁴ Whether such books found their way into Bengal is not definitely known; but we have at least one book on archery called *Hedāyat al-Rāmī* written in Bengal by one Sayyid Mīr 'Alwī who dedicated it to Sultān 'Alā' al-Dīn Husain Shāh.⁵ The various weapons were mainly manufactured locally for which purpose the Sultāns maintained special workshops (*kārkhānas*). It is on record that after Ṭughral's defeat and execution Balban handed over the Bengal arms *kārkhāna* to his son Prince Bughra Khān.⁶ Similarly Sher Shāh captured Sultān Nuṣrat Shah's *Tōpkhāna* (Gunnery) after defeating him.⁷

Necessarily the different branches of the armed forces were organized under graded officials. Unfortunately we have no detailed information on this point. We get from the inscriptions only four official designations, namely, *Sar-i-Lashkar*, *Sar-i-*

¹ Quoted in the *Book of Duarte Barbosa*, II, *op.cit.*, 245.

² *Ahom Burunji*, 68, 70, 72 and 73, quoted in Tarafdar, *op.cit.*, 105.

³ *Barānī*, 480, 593; *Firishta*, 299, 301; *Riyād*, 104, 128.

⁴ David James, *Islamic Art An Introduction*, London, 1974, 13. James specially mentions an Arabic Encyclopedia of warfare (manuscript) preserved in the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin, and reproduces an illustration from the work showing a Mamlūk knight exercising with two swords and two shields at a time.

⁵ Charles Rieu, *Catalogue of the Persian Manuscripts in the British Museum*, Vol. II, London, 1881, 489, No. Add. 26306.

⁶ *Barānī*, 92.

⁷ Badāoni, *Muntakhab*, Bib. Ind. edn., 1869, 360.

Khail, *Mīr-i-Bahr* and *Jangdār*. *Sar-i-Lashkar* means Head or Commander of the army, and it is mentioned separately as well as in connection with provincial governors who were also *wazīrs* in their respective territories. The expression *Sipāh Sālār*, of which mention is made by Minhāj as early as the time of Muḥammad bin Bakhtiyār Khaljī's stay in north India,¹ does not appear to have been popular in Bengal, for in none of the rather numerous inscriptions does this term occur.² We may therefore take *Sar-i-Lashkar* as the highest rank in the armed forces in Bengal, the supreme command for all the branches being reserved for the Sultān. On the analogy of *Sar-i-Lashkar*, *Sar-i-Khail* could have been interpreted as the highest rank in the cavalry; but the inscription in which it is mentioned³ the *Sar-i-Khail* (Ulugh Ajmal Khān) is clearly stated to be a subordinate official under the *Sar-i-Lashkar* and *wazīr* (Iqrār Khān). According to one description noted by Barānī and relating to the state of affairs in north India, a *Sar-i-Khail* was in charge of ten horsemen only, whereas ten *Sar-i-Khails* were commanded by one *Sipāh Sālār*, ten *Sipāh Sālārs* by an 'Amīr, ten 'Amīrs by a *Malīk*, and ten *Malīks* by a *Khān*.⁴ The gradation is palpably inaccurate even with reference to north India where the *Sipāh Sālār* was a far higher rank, if not the commander-in-chief, than the head of a mere hundred horsemen. Nor are *Malīks* and *Khāns* found elsewhere to refer to ranks in the cavalry. If that were so, the large numbers of *Malīks* and *Khāns* mentioned in the Bengal inscriptions would have to be each assigned at least a hundred thousand cavalry, which is manifestly an impossible number. Our *Sar-i-Khail* of the Tribeni record, Ulugh Ajmal Khān, himself bore the title of the Great Khān (*Khan al-A'zam*) and the Exalted *Khāqān* (*Khāqan al-Mua'zzam*). Obviously he was not so petty an officer as the

¹ Minhāj (tr.), I., 549. It is stated that Muḥammad bin Bakhtiyār Khaljī, after leaving Delhi, proceeded to the *Sipāh Sālār* of Badaon, Hizbar al-Dīn.

² The Mandāran inscription of 'Alā' al-Dīn Husain Shāh of 900/1494-95 mentions one *Shāhlar* Mubārak. M. R. Tarafdar (*op. cit.*, 104) takes it to be *Sipāh Sālār* arguing that the "first unit of the whole expression has disappeared". The explanation is not convincing, for *Sālār* is written with the Arabic letter *Sīn*, and not with *Shīn* as it is here. Similarly Mahuan's mention of the term (*J. A. S. B.*, 1895, 532) which Tarafdar quotes is not also clear on the point.

³ Tribeni inscription of Bārbak Shāh dated 860/1455, Dani, *Bibliography*, No. 29.

⁴ Barānī, 145. The description is attributed to Nāṣir al-Dīn Bughra Khān who is said to have mentioned this while advising his son Kaiqobād.

commander of ten horsemen only, nor of course so great as that of a hundred thousand cavalymen. Taking the inscription as it is, therefore, the most that can be suggested is that a *Sar-i-Khail* was in all likelihood head of the cavalry posted in a province or administrative division, but that he was subordinate to the *Sar-i-Lashkar* in the area.

- *Jangdār* means etymologically a warrior; but in the inscription¹ it clearly refers to a rank in the army. It was at least prestigious enough to deserve recording in the inscription along with the officer's name. It is noteworthy that this *Jangdār*, Ulugh Nusrat Khān, was attached and subordinate to the same *Sar-i-Lashkar* Iqrār Khān who was by this time transferred to north Bengal. Like the *Sar-i-Khail* Ulugh Ajmal Khān, Ulugh Nusrat Khān also bore the honorific title of the Great Khān (*Khān al-A'zam*) and the Exalted *Khāqān* (*Khāqān al-Mu'azzam*) and his full official designation was "*Jangdār and Shiqdār-i-Mu'āmalāt* (administrator of the affairs) of Jor, Baror and other *Maḥals*". *Shiq* means a part or division. The term *Shiqdār* thus clearly means a person in charge of the *Shiq*, in other words a subdivisional or district officer. Considering the fact that he had several *Maḥals* under his charge, it would perhaps be more accurate to take him to be a district officer. *Jangdār* thus appears to be an army officer in charge of a district or several *Maḥals*. Like the combination "*Sar-i-Lashkar and Wazir*", here is also a similar combination of "*Jangdār and Shiqdār*" in the case of the district officer. The conclusion that naturally suggests itself is that the provincial governor's jurisdiction was divided for administrative purposes into a number of districts or *Shiqs*, consisting of a group of *Maḥals*, and that like him the district officers were also in charge of both the civil and military affairs of their respective areas.

The term *Mīr-i-Baḥr* means admiral or commander of the fleet. It indicates that there were other subordinate officers. Unlike the *Sar-i-Lashkar*, however, *Mīr-i-Baḥr* does not combine in himself any civil post, nor does he appear to be subordinate to

¹ Dinajpur inscription of Bārbak Shāh dated 16 Šafar 865/1 Dec. 1460, Dani, *Bibliography*, No. 33.

the civil authority of the area where he was posted. The nature of his duty precluded the possibility of such combination of civil and military duties in one hand. The navy thus appears to be an independent establishment controlled perhaps by the admiralty department of the Sultān. The particular *Mīr-i-Baḥr* of the inscription, Zāhīr al-Dīn Malīk Akhund Shīr, was posted near Dacca where he caused the construction of a mosque.¹ This is significant. The locality being in the heart of the riverine east Bengal and commanding the confluence of the three principal rivers—the Ganges, the Brahmaputra and the Lakhya—was the natural headquarters of the river flotilla of the Bengal Sultāns. It was thus no unusual thing that the commander of the fleet was posted in that region and that perhaps the headquarters of the fleet were somewhere near Dacca. Probably there were other naval outposts at such strategic sites as Sātgaon (near Hugli) and the capital Gaud-Pandua. The information yielded by this inscription, together with the information about the army outposts (*Thānas*), enable us to form an idea about the defence and military arrangements of the Bengal Sultānat. Laobla in the 24-Parganas district and Laod in the Sylhet district were two important *Thānas* or cantonments providing for the defence of the Sultānat in the two strategic regions in the east and the south-west. There was also a strong fort called Maḥmūdabād in the Dacca district.² The intermediate region of south and central Bengal were mainly looked after by the fleet with its headquarters near Dacca. In the north there were, besides the fortified capitals of Gaud and Pandua (in the Malda district), important military outposts at Jor-Baror in the north-west (Purnia district) and the strong forts of Ekdala and Deokot in Dinajpur district, in the north and north-east.

Whether the defence and military department was in charge of a minister is a moot point. An inscription of the time of Fath Shāh dated 889/1484 and found at Gaud (near the Gunamant

¹ Dhamrai inscription of the time of Fath Shāh, dated 10 Jamādī I, 887/ 18 July 1482, Dani, *Bibliography*, No. 54; Ahmed, *Inscriptions*, 117-118. The inscription was found by Dr. Wise in a private house at Pathantala, Dhamrai village, near Dacca. The mosque, of which the construction is recorded in the inscription is not in existence; but it could not have been far away from the locality where other remains of an early Muslim settlement are visible.

² *Āin*, II (tr. Jarrett, and rev. Sarkar), 135.

mosque) mentions one *Khān al-A'zam* and *Khāqān al-Mu'azzam* Daulat Khān as *Wazīr-i-Lashkar* (Minister of the Army?).¹ It has been assumed that this is a mistake for the expression *Wazīr wa Sar-i-Lashkar* so frequently met with in the inscription.² But it is hazardous to assume such a mistake, especially when there is no damage or lacunae in the record. Moreover, it is necessary to remember that before an inscription was fixed onto a structure it must have been examined carefully to see that it was correctly executed. Such a big mistake as the omission of two consecutive words, *wa* and *Sar*, giving a different and rather confused meaning to the official designation of the person responsible for the construction of the structure, could not have so easily escaped notice. Again, if it was an inadvertent omission, it would have in all likelihood been limited to one word only, or perhaps to the smaller word *wa*, making the expression appear as *Wazīr Sar-i-Lashkar*. But then, the inscription under reference is in "beautiful *Naskh*, which is apparently worked by an expert engraver."³ Moreover, the expression which is more frequently found on the inscriptions is not *Wazīr wa Sar-i-Lashkar*, but the reverse, *Sar-i-Lashkar wa Wazīr*. *Wazīr-i-Lashkar* thus appears to be a correct and conscious expression and not simply a mistake for the expression *Sar-i-Lashkar wa Wazīr*. It may also be pointed out in this connection that Bābur mentions one *Lashkar Wazīr* with reference to Bengal who is clearly a minister concerned with military affairs.⁴ The same impression is conveyed by the *Ahom Burunji* which speaks of a *Baḍa Wazīr* or *Great Minister* dealing with war and peace. It would appear that *Wazīr-i-Lashkar* was a distinct and different post and the person holding it was primarily concerned with the defence and army organization of the state. Considering the fact that *wazīrs* were often responsible for financial affairs, it has been very plausibly assumed that the expression *Wazīr-i-Lashkar* may be taken to mean the Paymaster

¹ Dani, *Bibliography*, No. 58; Ahmed, *Inscriptions*, 122-123. Ahmed thinks that the inscription was originally attached to the Gunamant mosque. In that case it was built by the *Wazīr-i-Lashkar* Daulat Khān.

² Dani, *op.cit.*, 36, 99, 100, 144.

³ Ahmed, *op.cit.*, 123.

⁴ *Memoirs*, II, 676.

General of the army, somewhat akin to the *Mīr-i-Bakshī* of the Mughal period.¹ Such a function would not in any case be incompatible with the nature of his post as Minister of Defence or Army Affairs in general. It is certain, however, that the salary and emoluments of the army and other officers were paid in cash² and that there was no system of assigning *jāgīrs* for the payment of civil or military officers.

VII: GOVERNMENT AND THE PEOPLE

(a) *Administration of Justice*: Of all the aspects of governmental activities the one that most directly concerned the people at large was the administration of justice and protection of life and property. This the Bengal Sultāns appear to have considered the most sacred part of their duties. Indeed their success in this respect constituted their chief claim to the allegiance of the people. Many of the Sultāns are found to emphasize the fact of their being *just* on their coins and inscriptions. Thus Sultān Shams al-Dīn Ilyās Shāh (740-759/1339-1358) is described on his coins as “the Just Sultan” (السلطان العادل);³ while his successor Sikandar Shāh (759-792/1358-1390) is called on his coins as well as inscriptions as “the Just Sultān” and “the most learned man” (السلطان العادل العالم الأعظم).⁴ The same expressions of “the Just and the Learned Sultān” etc. are found on the coins and inscriptions of many other Sultāns like Nāṣir al-Dīn Maḥmūd Shāh (840-864/1442-1459),⁵ Rukn al-Dīn Bārbak Shāh (864-879/1459-1474),⁶ Shams al-Dīn Yūsuf Shāh (879-886/1474-1481),⁷ Jalāl al-Dīn Fath Shāh (886-892/1481-1486),⁸ Nāṣir al-Dīn Maḥmūd Shāh II (895-896/1489-1490),⁹ Shams al-Dīn Muẓaffar Shāh (896-899/1490-1493),¹⁰ ‘Alā’ al-Dīn Husain Shāh (899-925/

¹ Tarafdar, *op.cit.*, 102.

² *Firishta*, II, 301. The Chinese account, *op.cit.*, 118; and Mahuan’s account, *J.R.A.S.*, 1895, 530. See also Karim, *op.cit.*, 99; Tarafdar, *op.cit.*, 111.

³ *Cat. II.*, Nos., 24-27.

⁴ *Ibid.*, No. 56; Dani, *Bibliography*, Nos. 14, 16.

⁵ *Ibid.*, No. 25.

⁶ *Ibid.*, Nos. 29, 30, 31, 32, 34, 35, 36, 40; *Cat. II.*, 147.

⁷ Dani, *Bibliography*, Nos. 49, 50.

⁸ *Ibid.*, Nos. 58, 60, 64, 65.

⁹ *Ibid.*, No. 68.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, No. 72.

1493-1519)¹ and his son and successor Nāṣir al-Dīn Nuṣrat Shāh (925-939/1519-1532).² These claims of being just etc. could not have been mere eulogies, for many of the inscriptions and all the coins in which these occur were issued by the Sultāns themselves, and they could not have made such claims unless these had relevance to actual facts or unless they meant to be so in their practical conduct of affairs.

This fact of the Sultāns' being just is also corroborated by contemporary chronicles. They administered justice in accordance with the sacred laws of Islam, the *sharī'a*.³ This had a threefold impact on the character of the ruler and his administration. In the first place it had the consequence of the Sultāns' being in most cases well versed in Islamic learning, specially in the rules of the *sharī'a*,—a fact which, as indicated above, was also noted in their coins and inscriptions. One of them, Sultān Jalāl al-Dīn Fath Shāh, is particularly described in one of his inscriptions as the "Expounder of the Secrets of the Qur'ān and Learned in all the branches of religious and physical sciences" (كاشف أسرار القرآن) (عالم علوم الأديان والأبدان).⁴ Not only the Sultāns, but also many of their officers, not particularly judicial officers, are found to be greatly learned men. One of them, Taqī al-Dīn, who appears to be a governor in the eastern province, is described as the "leader of the lawyers and specialists in *ḥadīth*" (قدوة الفقهاء والمحدثين).⁵ Secondly and more importantly, the application of the *sharī'a* meant that though the Sultāns were at the head of the judicial machinery, they themselves were in no way above the law and were accountable for any wrong act or transgression of duty. The well-known incident of Sultān Ghiyāth al-Dīn A'zam Shāh's having appeared before the *Qāḍī* of the capital city for answering criminal charges brought against him (the Sultān) by an old woman⁶ is a remarkable instance in point. Thirdly, it also obliged the Sultāns to seek the support and cooperation of the '*ulamā*'.

¹ *Ibid.*, Nos. 85, 86, 93, 94, 111, 121. *Cat. II.*, Nos. 182, 189, 190, 194, 198.

² *Dam. Bibliography*, Nos. 133, 135, 137.

³ *Firishta*, II, 298-299; *Riyād*, 105, 113, 118.

⁴ *Dam. Bibliography*, No. 58.

⁵ Sunārgāon inscription of Nuṣrat Shāh, dated 929/1523, *op. cit.*

⁶ *Supra*, pp. 141-142.

Some of the Sultāns like Shams al-Dīn Yūsuf Shāh, for instance, used to call the 'ulamā' to his presence from time to time, had consultations with them and urged them to be impartial in the discharge of their duties.¹ Another ruler, Sulaimān Karrānī, used to hold a meeting every morning with 150 *shaikhs* and 'ulamā' after which he transacted other affairs of state.²

The Sultān tried cases in the first instance as well as on appeal. Usually grave offences like treason and heresy were directly dealt with by him; otherwise he heard on appeal. There are references to punishments by death, imprisonment or fine, but we have no detailed information about specific punishments for specific offences. For the administration of justice *qāḍīs* or judges were appointed at all important places and towns. It would appear from one inscription³ that there were special criminal courts for trying criminal cases. The *qāḍīs* were specially learned persons having great influence in the society. We have the names of several *qāḍīs* of the capital city. Of such metropolitan *qāḍīs* the earliest notable figure was Qāḍī Rukn al-Dīn al-Samarqandī who, during the time of 'Alī Mardan Khaljī, was instrumental in converting Bhojar Brahman of Kāmṛūp to Islam and also in having the Sanskrit work *Amṛitkunda* translated into Arabic and Persian.⁴ Another important figure was Qāḍī Sirāj al-Dīn who summoned the Sultān Ghiyāth al-Dīn A'zam Shāh for answering criminal charges against him. Whether the metropolitan *qāḍīs* were at the head of a hierarchy of judges is not definitely known, though, in view of the gradations in other branches of the administration it would be reasonable to assume that in the judicial department too there was such a gradation. In any case we have rather numerous references to *qāḍīs* at other places in the country. Of such *qāḍīs* a very remarkable figure was Qāḍī Nāṣir Muḥammād at Tribenī (Hugli). He is described as belonging to a family of *qāḍīs* and is also called "Qāḍī, the Tiger", because of the strength of his argument.⁵ It is

¹ *Firishṭa*, II., 298.

² *Ain*, 17, *Badāyūnī*, *Muntakhab* II, 76, 173, 176 and 200. See also Sulaimān Karrānī's inscription, *J.A.S.B.*, 1875, 303-304.

³ Deokot inscription of the time of 'Alā' al-Dīn Husain Shāh dated 918/1512 wherein the office of the Judge of the Criminal Court is mentioned.

⁴ *Infra*, pp. 782, 844.

⁵ Zafar Khan's mosque inscription dated 698/1298, *Dam*, *Bibliography*, No. 7.

also recorded that he used to spend his private money for maintaining men of learning as well as students for the teaching of the law of the *sharī'a* and also "to manifest the Divine faith among the head-strong." The *Vaishnava* literature makes mention of the *qāḍīs* at Hāsanhātī, Burdwan, and at Nadia who dealt with cases between the *Vaishnavas* and their opponents. It is even stated that the *qāḍī* at the latter place had allegedly a rather unsuccessful religious discussion with Chaitanya, the *Vaishnava* leader.¹ Another notable mufassal *qāḍī* was that of Chāndpārā, "a village in Rādh", who was patron of 'Alā' al-Dīn Husain Shāh during his early life and before he became Sultān.² In Fact there were so many *qāḍīs* appointed all over the country that some contemporary and near-contemporary Bengali poets tend to refer to them, along with Mughals and Pāthāns, as even a distinct stock of people.³

For the detection of crimes and for the protection of life and property of the people the Sultān had an elaborate police establishment. Mention has already been made of the Chief Police Officer of the city of Fīrūzabād (Pandua) and of a secret service.⁴ There were similar establishments in every administrative division and city, controlled and coordinated, presumably, by a central body. The sixteenth century Bengali literature has numerous references to the effective system of police administration even in the rural areas and to the perfect peace and security in which people lived.⁵ Two specific instances of police vigilance and security measures mentioned in connection with Chaitanya's life may be noted. It is stated that on one occasion Chaitanya, in one of his trances and surrounded by five of his disciples, lay senseless on the ground, foaming in the mouth. Suddenly there

¹ Krishnadas Kavirāj, *Chaitanya Charitāmrita*, Ādi, 17th, quoted in Karim, *Social History etc.*, Dacca, 1959, 200-202.

² *Riyād*, 187-188.

³ See for instance Mukundarām, quoted in J.N. Das Gupta, *op. cit.*, 89-90. The poet says:

আইসে চড়িয়া ডাৰি, সৈয়দ বোপল কাৰি,
খব্বাতে বীর সৈয়দ বাড়ি।

⁴ *Supra*, p. 700.

⁵ See for instance Vijayagupta, *Manasāṃgala*, quoted in S.K. Sen, *Bānglā Shāhityer Itihās*, Calcutta, 1940, 150.

appeared ten mounted police and arrested those five followers suspecting them to be bad characters who had drugged Chaitanya and robbed him of all his possessions.¹ The scene of the incident appears to be somewhere in the vicinity of Nadia. It throws a "curious sidelight", as one writer observes, "on the administration of justice and the methods in vogue for the protection of life and property in the land."² Similarly the *Chaitanya Bhāgavat* of Mukundarām narrates that a group of bandits led by a Nadia Brahman made repeated attempts to rob Chaitanya of his wealth and possessions; but they could not succeed in their design because of the vigilance of armed *pāiks* (foot soldiers) whom the robbers found surrounding and keeping guard over Chaitanya's house.³

(b) *Benevolent activities*: The Sultāns were equally alive to the material and moral well-being of the people. The intellectual activities of the rulers and their patronage of learning and literature have been noted in a separate section. Here their other benevolent works aiming at the material well-being of the people are mentioned briefly. The contemporary sources are replete with references to the generosity of the Sultāns and their liberal distribution of monetary help to the needy and the meritorious. Besides such munificence the rulers also carried out such public works as the construction of roads, bridges and embankments, and the excavation of tanks for providing drinking water for the people. Such works received the attention of government as early as the time of Sultān Ghiyāth al-Dīn 'Iwāḍ Khaljī (610-624/1213-1227). It is recorded by Minhāj that 'Iwāḍ Khaljī had a series of embankments constructed to protect the city of Lakhnawatī and its environs from the annual floods during the rainy season. He also had the two frontier cities of Deokot in Dinajpur and Lakhnūr in Birbhum connected with the capital city by a trunk road which ran, according to the historian's description, for a distance of ten days' journey.⁴ If "it were not for these dykes", further writes Minhāj, "it would be impossible for people to carry

¹ *Chaitanya Charitāmrita*, quoted in J.N.Das Gupta, *op.cit.*, 37.

² *Ibid.*

³ Quoted in *ibid.*, 37, 38.

⁴ *Minhāj*, tr. I, 586.

out their intentions, or reach various structures and inhabited places except by means of boats. From his time, through the construction of those embankments, the route was opened up to the people at large." The historian himself noticed these works when he visited Bengal some forty years afterwards and also "heard" that when the Delhi Sultān Iltutmish came to Bengal in the course of his campaign there he was likewise so impressed by "the good works of Ghiyas-ud-Din 'Iwaz" that whenever the latter's name "chanced to arise, he would style him by the title of 'Sultān Ghiyas-ud-Din Khaljī', and from his sacred lips he would pronounce that there could be no reluctance in styling a man Sultān who had done so much good."¹

The work begun by 'Iwaz Khaljī was continued by his successors. Such public works appear to have received considerable momentum in the time of the first restored Ilyās Shāhī ruler Nāṣir al-Dīn Maḥmūd Shāh (846-864/1442-1459). During his time, as mentioned earlier, a great part of southern Bengal, then covered with forests, was brought under settlement and cultivation.² His famous governor, Khān Jahān, who was mainly instrumental in doing this notable work, also caused the construction of a number of big tanks, besides mosques, in different parts of the region. Two such big tanks, each with a circumference of about a mile, are still in a good state of existence near Bagerhat (Khulna district). Curiously enough, although the surrounding area and its water is rather saline, the water of these two tanks is sweet and they still serve as the main source of supply of drinking water for the people of Bagerhat and its vicinity. Two inscriptions of the same ruler (Maḥmūd Shah) also refer to the construction of two bridges (قنطرة), one at Bhagalpur in Bihar,³ and the other at Gaud.⁴ The bridge at Gaud has been identified by Blochmann with the one near the Kotwali gate,⁵ which was the central

¹ *Ibid.*, 586-587.

² *Supra*, pp. 165-167.

³ Bhagalpur inscription, dated 5 Ṣafar 854/ 21 March 1450, Dani, *Bibliography*, No. 140 [150]; and Ahmed, *Inscriptions*, 52-53.

⁴ Gaud (Kotwali gate) Inscription of Maḥmūd Shāh, dated 5 Ṣafar 862/23 Dec., 1457, Dani, No. 25; Ahmed, *op cit.*, 59-60.

⁵ *J.A.S.B.*, 1875, 289.

entrance in the south wall of the city near Mahdipur. "It is paved with bricks and stone slabs and has a gentle ascent and descent. It ... consists of five pointed arches, the middle one being 11 feet 6 inches span, the next one on each side 10 feet 3½ inches, and the end arches 9 feet 1 inch. The piers also lessen in the same manner, the two middle ones being 10 ft. 6 inches thick and the other two 9 feet 3 inches. The roadway is 27½ feet broad and 257 feet long. A similar bridge is to be seen south of the Gunamant Mosque. These two were flung over a rivulet which constituted the main drain and means of access to the interior of the town."¹

The tempo of public works was continued by Nāṣir al-Dīn Mahmūd's son and successor Rukn al-Dīn Bārbak Shāh (864-879/1459-1474). It would appear from the *Risālat al-Shuhadā'* that he either constructed new embankments or repaired and enlarged the old ones in order to protect the capital city and its vicinity from floods, and that in this work he was ably assisted by Shāh Ismā'īl Ghāzī, a hero of his time, who combined in himself both military abilities and engineering skill.² The work of reclamation of the southern lands also continued during Bārbak Shāh's reign.³ A fairly large tank constructed during his reign near Mirzaganj in southern Barisal, but since covered by jungles, was discovered in the mid-nineteenth century by the then Sundarbans Commissioner J.H. Reily.⁴ Bārbak Shāh also caused the construction of a canal and a "middle gate" at Gaud.⁵

The greatest ruler in this respect was undoubtedly 'Alā al-Dīn Husain Shāh (899-925/1493-1519) who is credited by both epigraphic records and literary sources with having constructed a large number of tanks in different parts of the country for providing drinking water for the people, and also some bridges to

¹ Ahmed, *op.cit.*, 59.

² *Risālat al-Shuhadā'*, reproduced and translated in *J.A.S.B.*, 1874, 215 ff.

³ See Mirzaganj Inscription of Bārbak Shāh, dated 870/1465, Ahmed, *op.cit.*, 81-83.

⁴ J.H. Reily's letter to the President of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, dated 10 July 1860, quoted in *ibid.*, 82.

⁵ Gaud Inscription of Bārbak Shāh, dated 871/1466, *Memoirs*, 56-58; also Ahmed, *op.cit.*, 85-88. Ahmed thinks that the "middle gate" mentioned in the inscription is in all likelihood the *Nīm Darwāza* (Half-way Gate) which "stands exactly halfway between the Entrance Gate (*Dākhil Darwāza*) and the palace wall", and which "is curiously similar to that of the *Dākhil Darwāza*, with which it agrees in the height of its arches and battlements." (*ibid.*, 85).

facilitate communications by roads. At least six of his inscriptions so far discovered specifically commemorate the construction of tanks at such different localities as Haiderpur (Malda), Mangalkot in Burdwan, Jangipur in Murshidabad district, and Birbhum.¹ The tank at Jangipur is still known as the *Shaykher Dīghī* or *Sāgar Dīghī* (the Shaikh's tank or the Sea Tank). Of the bridges constructed during his reign two, one near Tribeni (Hugli) and the other at Jāhānabād, four miles to the west of Godāgāri in Rajshahi district, are commemorated by two inscriptions found at those places.² Besides tanks and bridges he also established rest-houses for travellers and alms-houses for the poor in different districts of the country.³ The near-contemporary poet Daulat Uzīr Bahrām speaks eloquently of the Sultān's benevolence and adds that his "chief" *wazīr* Ḥamīd Khān caused the establishment of alms-houses and mosques and the excavation of tanks at different places.⁴ 'Alā' al-Dīn Ḥusain Shāh's son and successor Nuṣrat Shāh also attended to such public works. His Sunārgāon inscription records the construction of a tank, along with a mosque, in that region by his officer Taqī al-Dīn, mentioned earlier, in the year 929/1523.⁵ Another inscription of his reign found in the Hugli district records the construction of a well in a mosque there by one Malik al-Mu'azzam Malīk Anwar Khān Nuṣrat Shāhī on 2 Dhu al-Qa'dah, 930/1523-24;⁶ while still another inscription found at Chalispara, Malda, commemorates the excavation of a tank there in 938/1531-32 by a lady named Bua Mālī (or Bibi Mālī).⁷ During the last Ḥusian Shāhī ruler Ghiyāth al-Dīn Maḥmūd Shāh's reign (939-944/1533-1537) one bridge was constructed at Dhorail in Dinajpur district by his minister Farāsh Khān, son of Nūrbāj (or Nur Bakhsh) Khān in 1533.⁸

¹ See Dani, *Bibliography*, Nos., 89, 100-102, 110, 11; and Ahmed, *Inscriptions*, 166, 167, 184-185, 193; and *Memoirs*, 158, 159.

² Dani, *Bibliography*, Nos. 93 and 122.

³ *Riyād*, 133.

⁴ Daulat Uzīr Bahrām, *Laili Majnu* (composed between 1545 and 1553, ed. Ahmed Sharif), Dacca, 1957, 7-8.

⁵ Dani, *Bibliography*, No. 124; Ahmed, *Inscriptions*, 209; *J.A.S.B.*, 1872, 337-38.

⁶ Dani, *op.cit.*, No. 148 [158], p. 138.

⁷ *Ibid.*, No. 140.

⁸ *Ibid.*, No. 145.

Besides these public works of which we have specific information there must have been others whose existence or records have completely disappeared. To illustrate this point it may be mentioned that when the British occupied the country in the mid-eighteenth century they found it covered with a number of good public highways. One of the early European observers wrote: "There are several remarkable military causeways which intersect the whole country, and must have been constructed with great labour; but it is not known at what period."¹ It may also be pointed out that the work of preservation of historical relics and monuments was not undertaken till the beginning of the twentieth century by which time many of them disappeared either by the process of time or by deliberate destruction.

(c) *Attitude towards the non-Muslim population:* The same benevolence and liberalism is noticeable in the rulers' attitude towards the non-Muslim population. On the eve of the Muslim conquest the three main religious groups in the land in order of numerical strength were the Hindus, the Buddhists and the Jains. Between them the idea of religious toleration was unknown, as was indeed the case in many other parts of the then world. Even the "higher" orders of the Hindus, the Brahmans, were not quite liberal towards their own "lower" castes, not to speak of the other religious groups. In fact during the Sena rule Buddhism, which had been previously the dominant religion in the land, was supplanted under state patronage by a rigid Brahmanical Hinduism with marked emphasis on high-birth (*kūlīnism*) and caste distinctions. Jainism had already lost its ground prior to the coming of the Senas. It was in such an atmosphere of iniquitous social discriminations that the Muslims appeared on the scene not just with a new "religion" as such but with a whole set of social ideas highlighted by the principle of equality of man and respect for him as the noblest creation of the only one Lord of the universe. These ideas were a direct threat to the social supremacy of the Sena aristocracy who naturally grew apprehensive about their future as the Muslims pressed on the neighbouring territory

¹ Quoted by Raverty, *Minhāj*, tr.I., 586,n 9.

of Bihar. Significantly enough, it is on record that the wise men and astrologers at Lakshman Sena's court, after having made enquiries about the character and disposition of the Muslims, foretold the doom of the Sena system and advised their king of the propriety of retreat into a safer zone. Many of the Sena ruler's courtiers and Brahman advisers had indeed betaken themselves to eastern Bengal, Assam and other places before Ikhtiyār al-Dīn Muḥammad even began his march towards Bengal. Thus the Sena ruler's apparently precipitate flight to eastern Bengal when the latter actually knocked at his door was not quite an unpremeditated leap in the dark. The people in general had however nothing to fear from a change of rulers and there is no indication in the sources of any popular stirrings on account of the coming of the Muslims. On the contrary there are unmistakable references to the latter's being welcomed as deliverers from an age-old system of injustice and oppression.¹

On their part the Muslim rulers, in consonance with the spirit of Islam, followed a policy of religious toleration and granted perfect freedom of belief to the people. There is no reference in the sources of any of the ruler's having ever attempted to impose Islam by force on any one of the conquered people. From the very beginning Islam was left to itself to make its mark on the people through persuasion and understanding so much so that we find a Kāmṛūp (Assam) Brahman coming to Lakhnawatī and holding a public disputation with the *qāḍī* of the capital city on the merits Islam only seven years after the establishment of Muslim rule in the country.² Nor was there any deliberate destruction of Hindu temples or Buddhist monasteries. It may be noted here that on the basis of stone slabs containing images and other animal forms and used in some early Muslim structures it has sometimes been suggested that those materials were obtained by dismantling Hindu temples.³ While the existence of numerous ancient temples in and around the Muslim seats of government negatives any such

¹ See for instance the Chapter on *Nirāṅjaner Rasmā* of the *Sunya Purāṇa*.

² See *infra*, pp. 782-783.

³ For instance Percy Brown, *Indian Architecture (Islamic Period)*, Second edition, Bombay, n.d. 38.

iconoclastic policy on the part of the rulers, it is worth noting that ancient non-religious structures like forts and residential quarters also were usually decorated with images and animal forms. And considering the fact that the Muslim structures belong to a later period when the enthusiasm of initial conquest had died out and when, as will be seen presently, Hindus were appointed not only in the army and other administrative posts but also as courtiers and ministers,¹ it is more reasonable to assume that the impugned materials were taken from abandoned forts and ruined ancient buildings rather than by breaking down Hindu temples.

The rulers also ensured security of life and property and left the people in undisturbed possession of their lands and other belongings requiring them, as already mentioned, to pay only the specified taxes. There was thus no break in the normal socio-economic life of the people. And although the laws of Islam (*sharī'at*) were applied in matters of general administration, the non-Muslim population were left free to regulate their personal affairs like marriage, succession etc. in accordance with their own religious laws and social customs.

Initially the rulers' policy towards the non-Muslim population was necessarily negative in nature, being confined to mere toleration and non-interference with their affairs. As time went on, however, it developed into one of active patronage and employment in state services. This was so partly because of the Sultāns' liberal outlook and partly because of necessity arising out of their conflicts with the Delhi rulers. Even such early rulers as Ghiyāth al-Dīn 'Iwāḍ Khālījī (610-622/1213-1225) and Muḡhīth al-Dīn Ṭuḡhrāl (670-680/1272-1282) appear to have recruited a number of local non-Muslim people in the army and the river-flotilla. A more positive evidence of such recruitment is available in connection with Ilyās Shāh's (740/739/1339-1358) struggle against the Delhi Sultān Fīrūz Ṭuḡhlaq. It is stated that the former recruited in his army a number of professional Bengal foot-soldiers (*pāiks*) in order to withstand the attack of the

¹ The earliest existing Muslim structure (Zafar Khān's mosque at Tribeni) is dated 698/1298, that is about a century after the conquest of Nadia. Percy Brown's remarks referred to above relates to the Adinā mosque which was built still later, during the reign of the second Ilyās Shāhi ruler Sikandar Shāh (759-792/1358-1390).

Tughlaq ruler.¹ Significantly, it is also on record that both the Bengal ruler and the Delhi Sultān sought on that occasion to win over the Muslim soldiery and nobility as well as the influential Hindus and their religious leaders (*gurus*) by rival proclamations promising remission of taxes and other considerations.² During the Ilyās Shāhī period non-Muslims were appointed, besides the army, in important administrative posts and even as courtiers.³ As already noted earlier, one such courtier, Rājā Kāns, grew influential enough to capture power for sometime. Whether there was any reversal of this policy after the Kāns episode is not definitely known, though some reaction to it may be guessed. Even if there was any, it was abandoned soon enough; for in the Husain Shāhī period which followed a number of Hindus are again found employed in high administrative posts, even as ministers and confidential secretaries of the Sultān.

The Muslim rulers in fact identified themselves with the land, encouraged the cultivation of the Bengali language and extended their patronage to both Muslim and Hindu writers and scholars. Under the patronage of the Sultāns many important Hindu religious works were translated into Bengali.⁴ One result of this policy was a great intellectual revival among the Hindus. Even Nadia, from where earlier the Brahmans had fled, grew to be an important centre of Hindu learning during the later Ilyās Shāhī period at the latest.⁵ It was from among this new Brahman intellectual class at Nadia that Chaitanya arose and led his reform movement during the early Husain Shāhī period. Chaitanya's movement was aimed as much at reforming the Hindu society and religion as at checking the progress of Islam among the people. And in the course of his movement he came in conflict with the Muslim *qāḍīs* of Nadia and Hasanahāti (west Bengal). Even then Sultān 'Alā' al Dīn Husain Shāh allowed complete

¹ *Baranī*, 593; Yahyā bin Ahmad Sarhindī, *Tārīkh-i-Mubārak Shāhī*, 125.

² *Inshā'-i-Mahru*, extract tr. in *J.A.S.B.*, 1923, 280.

³ See *supra*, pp. 134, 149, 151.

⁴ See *infra*, pp. 856-857.

⁵ See for a description of Nadia on the eve of Chaitanya's rise *Chaitanya Bhāgavat*, ed. M.K. Ghosh, 11, 44; Vijayagupta, *Padma Purāna*, ed. B.K. Bhattacharya, Barisal, n.d., 4, both quoted in *J.A.S.P.*, 1959, 87-88.

freedom of preaching to the Hindu reformer and, according to his biographers, asked the *qāḍīs*, the *kotwāls* and all others not to interfere with his activities in any way.¹

It would be clear from the above brief survey that the Muslim rulers were not only tolerant towards the local non-Muslim population but also treated them liberally, giving them equal opportunities along with the Muslims in matters of employment and intellectual activities. In the light of this fact the suggestion, sometimes made, that the non-Muslims were tempted to embrace Islam for the sake of official situations and advancement of their material conditions has to be taken with caution. There was indeed no such need for the non-Muslims to change their faiths just for the sake of state employment and similar material benefit.

¹ *Chaitanya Bhāgavat*, 350, *ibid.*, 89; also *Chaitanya charitāmrita, Madhyalīlā*, quoted in J.N.Das Gupta, *Bengal in the sixteenth Century A.D.*, Calcutta, 1914, 31 n. The specific reference to *Qāḍīs* and *Kotwāls* in the Sultān's circular as quoted by the poets leaves no room for doubt that it was issued after Chaitanya's conflict with the *Qāḍīs* of Nadia and Hasanhati. See *infra*.

CHAPTER XXVIII

GOVERNMENT AND ADMINISTRATION: II: THE MUGHAL PROVINCIAL SYSTEM IN BENGAL

Under the Mughals Bengal formed their easternmost province and was governed like all the other provinces by governors and other officers appointed by the central government at Delhi. In general the provincial administration was modelled on the pattern of the central structure. Two main features of the latter were the division of the administration into a number of specific departments and the *mansabdārī* system. The king was assisted in the work of administration by a *wazīr* or first minister, the *dīwān* or the head of the finance department, the *mīr-i-bakhshī* or the Pay-master-General of the armed forces, the *ṣadr-i-ṣudūr* or the head of religious and charitable affairs, the *qāḍi-al-quḍāt* or the Chief Justice, the *muḥatasib* or the Censor of the public morals, etc. There was however no clear distinction between civil and military departments and all the officers were graded in accordance with *mansabs* or military ranks which specified the number of troops he was expected to maintain and furnish for state services. All officers received their salaries according to their *mansabs*. Sometimes these *mansabs* were expressed in terms of *dhāt* and *sawār*.¹

The provinces had counterparts of the central heads of departments and officers except the *wazīr* whose position was taken up by the provincial governor. The latter was called *sipāh-sālār* (commander-in-chief) in the initial period when the process of conquest and consolidation was still in progress; but subsequently he was more generally known as *ṣubahdār* (literally, a person in charge of the *ṣubah* or *nāẓim* or *nawwāb* (the latter term meaning a representative, obviously of the emperor, and hence viceroy). But though a replica of the central government,

¹ Abū al-Faḍl, the Mughal historian, does not explain what exactly the *dhāt* and *sawār* ranks indicated. It is obvious, however, that there could be no *sawār* rank without a *dhāt* rank, nor could the former be higher than the latter. Also, the order of precedence was determined on the basis of *dhāt* rank. Thus an officer of a *mansab* of 3000 *dhāt* and 1000 *sawār* was higher in rank than one having a *mansab* of 2000 *dhāt* and 2000 *sawār*. The number indicated in the *mansab* was not actually the number of troops maintained and supplied by the *mansabdār*; it was only a notional figure indicating his rank and pay.

the provincial administration was characterized by a system of checks and balances designed to keep the provincial governor as well as other chief officers well under control. Broadly this latter objective was sought to be achieved by a three-fold arrangement. In the first place, the executive and revenue departments were made more or less independent of each other, the former headed by the *ṣūbahdār* and the latter by the provincial *dīwān*, both being more or less equal in status, and both directly responsible to the king (through the central *wazīr* and *dīwān* respectively). For the same reason, though the *ṣūbahdār* was also the commander of the armed forces within the province, the pay, maintenance and administration of the armed forces were entrusted to a *bakhshī* who was a counterpart of the central *mīr-i-bakhshī*. Secondly, the Mughals maintained an efficient information service in each province headed by an *wāqia' nawīs*. He was required to send regular and detailed reports to the emperor about all the affairs of the province including the conduct of the *ṣūbahdār*, the *dīwān* and other high officials. Thirdly, all these officers, including the *wāqia' nawīs*, held office only at the emperor's pleasure and were liable to transfer, recall or dismissal at any time. Usually the higher officials were periodically transferred from one province to another, there being no fixed period of their tenure of office in any province.

I. THE ṢŪBAHDĀR, THE DĪWĀN AND OTHER HIGH OFFICERS IN THE PROVINCE

In spite of the system of check and balance indicated above the *ṣūbahdār* came to occupy a position of primacy in the provincial set-up if only because he supervised the entire administration as its executive head and had the command of the armed forces, though he had no authority over finance, army establishment, religious and charitable affairs and the administration of justice which were dealt with respectively by the *dīwān*, the *bakhshī*, the *ṣadr*, and the *qāḍī*. These officers had necessarily to coordinate their activities and cooperate with the *ṣūbahdār*, and depending on the circumstances and personality of the latter, he often imposed his will on them and treated them almost as his subordinates. Such indeed was at least the attitude of Islām Khān, the first really

effective Mughal viceroy in Bengal. It is recorded by the contemporary annalist Mirzā Nathan that Islām Khān used to treat the other officers and nobles accompanying him as his subordinates requiring them to bow down before him and do other marks of respect. Islām Khān also adopted the manners and etiquette of a ruler such as sitting on a *jhāroka* (raised throne), setting up a special standard (*qurʿ*) for him and having kettle-drums beaten in the fashion of the emperor. These practices of the viceroy elicited the emperor Jahāngīr's sharp reproofs issued in the form of a 17-point directives to all the *ṣūbahdārs*.¹ The *ṣūbahdārs* were asked, inter alia, not to "deviate from the right principle" in food and drink, not to "hold any imperial review" such as sitting on a *jhāroka*, not to sit "on a place higher than half a human height above the ground," not to compel nobles and other central officers "to salute and make obeisance" (*taslīm* and *salām*), nor to make them remain standing on foot, and not to "beat kettle-drums at the time of setting out on a journey." The *ṣūbahdārs* were also asked to report faithfully the "services rendered by devoted officers" and otherwise to "work honestly and faithfully, and discharge their duties in strict accordance with the imperial regulations". Even after the receipt of these directives, states Mirzā Nathan, Islām Khān did not much mend his ways and persisted in his peremptory manners till his death.²

The problem was really inherent in the system of duality of jurisdiction sought to be effected by assigning equal status to two officials in the same province, namely the *ṣūbahdār* and the *dīwān*. This became clearer in the time of the next viceroy, Qāsim Khān, who was found to be equally "imperious" in attitudes. Indeed the inevitable conflict between the *ṣūbahdār* and the *dīwān* which remained under the surface during Islām Khān's time partly because of his personality and partly because of the overriding need for concerted action in dealing with the *Bāra Bhuiyāns*, burst forth in Qāsim Khān's time.³ Jahāngīr attempted to remedy the situation by combining the posts of *dīwān*, *bakhshī* and *wāqia'*-

¹ B.G., 213-214.

² *Ibid.*, 215, 224.

³ See *supra* p. 866 for conflicts between Qāsim Khān and the *dīwān* Mirzā Husain Beg.

nawīs in a new incumbent, Mukhlis Khān, so that he might keep Qāsim Khān in check.¹ This did not however improve matters much and the emperor was forced ultimately to recall Qāsim Khān from the province and also lower Mukhlis Khān's rank by reducing his *manṣab* by 1000 *dhāt* and 1000 *sawār*.²

Such conflicts between the *ṣubahdār* and the *dīwān* broke out from time to time even in the succeeding reign of Shāh Jahān. A *modus-vivendi* ultimately emerged, however, first by the appointment of prince Shujā' as viceroy in Bengal which he governed from 1639 to 1660 except for a short interval from 1648 to 1652, and then by the succession of two powerful viceroys, Mīr Jumla (1660-1664) and Shāista Khān (1664-1686). Mīr Jumla wielded considerable power and influence because of his excellent services, specially in connection with the war of succession, whereas Shāista Khān was emperor 'Ālamgīr's maternal uncle (brother of the queen Mumtāz Maḥal) and was otherwise a very influential noble. During these three viceroalties the practical superiority of the *ṣubahdār* in the province was tacitly acknowledged. Towards the end of 'Ālamgīr's reign, however, the problem once again manifested itself through the conflicts between the viceroy Prince 'Azīm al-Shān ('Ālamgīr's grandson) and the *dīwān* Murshid Qulī Khān. This, as noted earlier, led first to the transfer of the *dīwān*'s headquarters to Murshidabad and ultimately to the transfer of the capital from Dacca and the emergence of Murshid Qulī Khān as the virtual ruler of the province combining in himself the powers of both the *dīwān* and the *ṣubahdār*. Under 'Ālamgīr's successors the Murshidabad Nawwābs were independant rulers for all practical purposes though they continued to acknowledge the Delhi ruler's nominal sovereignty and receive his formal appointments for themselves as well for the other officers like the *dīwān*, the *bakhshī*, etc.

The duties and functions of the *ṣubahdār* and the *dīwān* however remained all along distinct and well-defined, and they both were directly responsible to the emperor. The *ṣubahdār* was

¹ B.G., 386-88.

² *Ibid.*, 409, 419.

the head of the civil administration of the province and was responsible for its defence, criminal justice and general supervision. He heard cases on appeal from the *qādī* but could not inflict death sentence without the emperor's approval. The *ṣūbahdār* was also the commander of the armed forces stationed within the province and had considerable initiative in matters of defence; but he could not undertake a new campaign against a neighbouring territory nor conclude a treaty with the latter without the emperor's sanction. As already mentioned, the *ṣūbahdār* had also no authority over finance, army establishment, religious and charitable affairs and the administration of justice. He was required to help the *qādī* and the *shaikhs* in the province and was constantly enjoined to improve agriculture and look after the interests of the people in general. He was also to report regularly about his and other officers' activities in the province and to make recommendations for appointments, promotions and rewards.

The *dīwān* was in charge of the revenue administration of the province. He supervised the collection and disbursement of the revenue and was assisted in this task by a *khājanchī* (treasurer) and other officers. No amount from the treasury could be spent by the *ṣūbahdār* without the *dīwān*'s sanction. Both the *ṣūbahdār* and the *dīwān* were at the heads of two graded services respectively on the administrative and revenue sides; and both acted as a check on the other. During Aurangzeb's time an officer named *ṣadr qānūngo* (chief expounder of the revenue laws and auditor) was created to assist the *dīwān*. Even a powerful *dīwān* like Murshid Qulī Khān found it necessary to reckon with the *ṣadr qanungo*. Darpa Narayan.

Coming next to the *ṣūbahdār* and the *dīwān* was the *bakhshī* (paymaster of the army). He was appointed by the emperor on the recommendation of the central *bakhshī*, and was responsible for the pay, organization, training and equipment of the armed forces in the province. It was also his duty to see that the *manṣabdārs* maintained their respective forces in order and readiness for military service. By the very nature of his duty the *bakhshī* had to deal equally with the *ṣūbahdār* and the *dīwān*. It was the *bakhshī*'s

duty to help the *ṣūbahdār* in organizing military campaigns when necessary. Often the *bakhshī* was entrusted with the task of leading campaigns against rebels or others. Another officer on the military side appointed by the emperor and posted in Bengal was the *mīr-i-bahr* (admiral) in charge of the *nawwāra* (fleet of war-boats). It was mainly in Bengal that the Mughals had their *nawwāra*. The headquarters of the *nawwāra* were situated near Dacca. Almost equal in rank to that of the *bakhshī* was the *wāqia'-nawīs* (news-writer) who was also appointed by the emperor and was responsible to him. The *wāqia'-nawīs* was to send regular reports about the affairs in the province and about the activities of the *ṣūbahdār*, the *dīwān* and others to the emperor. Both the *ṣūbahdār* and the *dīwān* were required to keep the *bakhshī* informed of all the affairs relating to their respective departments. Sometimes the *wāqia'-nawīs* had to adopt secret methods in sending adverse reports about the conduct of the *ṣūbahdār* and the *dīwān*. Two other high officials in the province were the *ṣadr* and the *qāḍī*. The former was in charge of religious affairs, charitable endowments, grant of rent-free lands and *jāgīrs* and intellectual activities. Persons of acknowledged integrity, knowledge and capability were appointed as *ṣadrs*. The *qāḍī* was at the head of the judicial administration in the province and was assisted, on the administrative side, by a *mīr-i-'adl*. Besides the administration of justice the *qāḍī* had also to administer wills and to take an inventory of a deceased officer's property in the province.

II: LOCAL ADMINISTRATION

For purposes of administration the *ṣūbah* was divided into a number of units which appear to have taken into account previous administrative divisions. The boundary of the Bengal *ṣūbah*, it may be noted, did not remain constant throughout the Mughal period. During Islām Khān's viceroyalty Bengal proper (including Sylhet, but excluding Chittagong and the districts north of Kuch Bihar) was brought under Mughal jurisdiction; and before the end of Jahāngīr's reign Kāmrūp in the north-east was annexed. During Shāh Jahān's reign the territory was further extended in that direction as far as Gauhati on the one hand, and in the

south-west Orissa was brought under the jurisdiction of the Bengal *ṣūbah* during prince Shujā's viceroyalty. Early in Aurangzeb's reign Mīr Jumla brought some further territories of Assam under control, while his successor Shāista Khān conquered Chittagong from the Arakanese. Towards the end of Aurangzeb's reign Bihar also was attached to Bengal for revenue purposes during the *dīwānī* of Murshid Qulī Khān and ultimately for administrative purposes as well during the time of Shaujā' al-Dīn Khān. As the *ṣūbah* thus extended and embraced almost the same territory as that of the previous Bengal Sultānat, the same natural and administrative divisions suggested themselves for adoption by the Mughals. Thus at least from Prince Shāh Shujā's time there came into being three distinct sub-provinces within the Bengal *ṣūbah* itself - eastern Bengal and the Assam territories under a *nā'ib-i-ṣūbahdār* and a *nā'ib-i-dīwān* with their headquarters at Jahāngīrnagar (Dacca); north, central and west Bengal under the direct supervision of prince Shujā' himself who fixed his headquarters at Rajmahal; and Orissa, including the district of Midnapur under another deputy *ṣūbahdār* and deputy *dīwān*. When Bihar was included in the administrative jurisdiction of the Bengal *ṣūbah* it was also placed under a deputy *ṣūbahdār* and a deputy *dīwān*. The appointments of the *nā'ib-i-ṣūbahdārs* and *nā'ib-i-dīwāns* were made by the emperor, but on the recommendation of the *ṣūbahdār* and the *dīwān* respectively. This arrangement became a settled fact in the latter part of Aurangzeb's reign and it continued to be followed throughout the Murshidabad *niyābat* when the capital of the *ṣūbah* was formally transferred to that place.

While these were the broad divisions of the *ṣūbah*, the further subdivisions did not also totally break away with the past. Abū al-Faḍl gives a list of 19 *sarkārs* and 682 *parganās* (or *maḥals*) for the whole of Bengal, and 5 *sarkars* and 99 *maḥals* for Orissa.¹ As at his time only a small part of Bengal was conquered by the Mughals it is obvious that he prepared the list on the basis of previous records, most probably of the Afghan period. Indeed

¹ *Ain*, II (tr. Jarrett), 141.

sarkār as an administrative unit came into existence during Sher Shāh's time. During Shāh Jahān's time when the Bengal *ṣūbah* included Orissa and parts of Assam, the number of *sarkārs* and *maḥals* are stated respectively to be 34 and 1350.¹ Subsequently Murshid Qulī Khān reorganizend the *sarkārs* into 13 *chāklās* and also regarranged the *maḥals* so that their number came to be 1660.² On the whole thus the fact that clearly emerges is that for administrative and revenue purposes the *ṣūbah* was divided into a number of *sarkārs* each of which was again subdivided into a number of *maḥals* (or *parganās*). Looking at their recorded numbers it would appear that the *sarkār* and *maḥal* respectively corresponded more or less with the modern district and *thāna* (police station) jurisdictions. Also the *sarkār* and *maḥal* were more or less a legacy of the administrative divisions of the Sulṭanat period when we find the mention of '*arṣah* and *maḥals* in inscriptions and coins.

The chief officers in the *sarkar* were the *faujdār* on the executive and the '*āmil* (also sometimes called '*amalguzār* or *bitikchi*) on the revenue side. There were also a *qāḍī* and a *kotwāl* (police officer) in each *sarkār*. Similarly in the *maḥal* (*parganā*) the chief executive officer was the *shiqdār* who had also some criminal jurisdiction. The chief revenue officer in the *maḥal* was the '*amīn*. There appears to be no *qāḍī* or *kotwāl* appointed at the *maḥal* level. In both *sarkār* and *maḥal* the chief officers in the executive and revenue sides were assisted by a number of subordinate staff in their respective departments. We have at least the names of *qānungo*, *pātwārī*, *kārkun* and *muqaddam* as subordinate officers assisting the '*amīn* of a *maḥal* in preparing and maintaining revenue records. The *faujdār* of the *sarkār* was however the pivot of the local administration. Being the officer immediately below the *ṣūbahdār* and *nā'ib-ṣūbahdār*, the *faujdār* supervised the entire administration in the *sarkār* and was responsible for maintaining peace and order in it, although he had no power to interfere in its revenue or judicial matters. It is stated

¹ *Fifth Report* (ed. Firminger), App. 4, 182-186.

² *T. B.*, 24b.

that if a theft or robbery took place in the *sarkār* and the miscreant escaped detection and apprehension, the *faujdār* was obliged to pay compensation to the person suffering loss on account of the crime.¹ Like all other officials in the Mughal administration the *faujdār* was also a *mansabdār* and had to maintain specified military forces. In times of war he was required to accompany the expeditions after having the affairs of the *sarkār* entrusted to a deputy or subordinate official. The *faujdārs* of border and strategically important *sarkārs* like Ghorāghāt, Purnia, Gauhati, Sylhet, Midnapur, etc., and of commercially important places like Hugli, Patna, Murshidabad and Dacca commanded great power and influence and are frequently mentioned in the contemporary accounts. In some border and newly conquered areas officers bearing the designations of *walī* and *sardār* were appointed. Their powers and functions appear to be similar to those of the *faujdār*. Also in some frontier and strategically important places *thānas* or military outposts were established under officers called *thānadārs*. The duty of a *thānadār* consisted mainly of keeping a watch on the frontier, repelling aggressions and realizing stipulated tributes from newly subjugated chiefs.

III: LAND-REVENUE ADMINISTRATION

Land-revenue was the principal source of income for the government which was only supplemented by the *sair* revenue, namely, customs and other taxes on the export and import of specified merchandize. The *sarkār* and the *parganā* divisions were intended for both general and revenue administration. Included within these divisions, and sometimes embracing more than one of these units, lands were categorized into *khalīṣa* (crown-lands) and *jāgīrs*. Revenue from the *khalīṣa* lands was usually collected by the revenue officials; but at times also through revenue-farmers called *mustajirs*. The entire *khalīṣa* revenue was to be sent to the emperor without utilizing it for any administrative purpose of the province. It has already been mentioned that for increasing the emperor's financial resources Murshid Qulī Khān had resumed many *jāgīrs* in Bengal to crown-lands (*khalīṣa*).

¹ Manucci, II, 421.

Jāgīrs, on the other hand, were specific areas assigned to officials and departments. Such assignments were not really alienations of tracts of land in "feudal fiefs", but only assignments of the revenue of those areas for the purpose of meeting the pay and emoluments of the officials concerned and the expenses of their respective departments. Thus the *ṣūbahdār*, the *dīwān*, the *bakhshī*, the *faujdār*, etc. and departments like the *nawwāra* and the *topkhāna* had specific *jāgīrs* assigned to them. Any surplus of the revenue from the *jāgīrs* that remained after meeting all the expenses was to be submitted to the public treasury. If there was any extra expenditure involved in any expedition or similar other undertaking, funds were specifically allocated by the emperor. As noticed earlier, during Shāista Khān's time the *jāgīrs* of officers in Bengal were reallocated so as to conform more or less with the *sarkār* and *parganā* divisions and to facilitate the task of administration and revenue collection. According to one account, the following types of *jāgīrs* existed in Bengal at the close of Murshid Qulī Khān's administration (in 1728, early in Shujā' al-Dīn Khān's time).¹

1. *Jāgīr-i-sarkār-i-a'lā*, or viceroyal establishment;
2. *Jāgīr-i-bandāh-i-'alī dargah* or *dīwanī* establishment;
3. *Jāgīr-i-'amīr-al-'umārā*, *bakhshī's* establishment;
4. *Jāgīr* of *faujdārs*;
5. *Jāgīr* of *manṣabdārs*;
6. *Madad-i-ma'āsh* (rent-free subsistence allowance);
7. *Salanadarān* (petty zamindari allowance);
8. *Jāgīr* of zamindars;
9. *Al-tamgah* (endowments);
10. *Ruzīandarān* (petty religious endowments);
11. *'Amlah-i-Ashām* (maintenance of eastern frontier forces);
12. *Nawwāra* (naval establishments);
13. *Kheda* (catching elephants).

The list does not seem to be exhaustive, for important officials like the *ṣadr*, the *wāqia'-nawīs* and others are not separately

¹ *Fifth Report*, 189-191; also quoted in A. Karim, *Murshid Quli Khan and his times*, Dacca, 1963, 79.

mentioned. Even if it is assumed that they were included in the general term, *manṣabdārs*, it appears from the above list that lands under the charge of *zamindars* and also those granted for charitable purposes are classified as *jāgīrs*. It may also be pointed out in this connection that so far as the revenue figures are available these are shown only under two heads, *khalīṣa* and *jāgīr* revenues. No separate heading such as revenue from the *zamindari* lands is mentioned. This fact helps us in understanding the position of the *zamindars* under the Mughals in Bengal. The word *zamindar* was of old origin. Early during the Muslim rule some historians refer to *rāyas* (most probably a corruption of the word *rājā*) and *zamindars* who appear to be petty chieftains. These *zamindars* were however eliminated when Muslim rule was consolidated in Bengal and we do not hear of them till the period of confusion following the break-up of the Karrānī kingdom and the rise on its ruins of the *Bāra Bhuiyāns* and other *zamindars*. After the suppression of the *Bāra Bhuiyāns* and the other *zamindars*, as already noted earlier, their lands were annexed. Only Mūsā Khān's son Ma'sūm Khān and the Afghan chieftain (*zamindar*) of Hijli-Burdwan were treated differently, the former being allowed to retain a much circumscribed estate on condition of his entering the Mughal service, while the latter was bound down to pay a specified yearly tribute (*pesh-kash*). Later on some frontier chieftains in Kuch Bihar and Tippera were also allowed to hold their estates on payment of yearly *pesh-kash* though, as a matter of administrative uniformity those territories were also grouped into *sarkārs* or *chaklas*. No other *pesh-kash* paying *zamindars* as such are known to have existed in Bengal during the Mughal period. Therefore the *zamindars* whom we come across in connection with the revenue administration of the period, specially since the time of Murshid Qulī Khān, were only revenue-collecting agents or contractors. As already pointed out earlier, neither the *zamindars*, nor the *jāgīrdars* were proprietors of the lands under their charges.¹ The *zamindars* collected the revenue in coordination with the other revenue officials in their

¹ See *supra*, pp.553-557.

respective localities and submitted the revenue to the *dīwān*'s office often through the *qānungo* and the *āmil*. The *zamindars* were also to follow the rate of assessment fixed by the *dīwān* and were not to collect any excess *abwabs* or cess from the *ra'yats*; and to receive as remuneration fixed amounts or assignments of lands yielding that revenue. Moreover, as in the case of *jāgīr* lands, so also with regard to the *zamindari* lands, specified tracts within them could be and were in many cases granted rent-free to different deserving persons or establishments by the ruler — a fact which clearly shows that the ownership of the land did not vest in the *zamindar* or *jāgīrdār* concerned. Indeed keeping an eye strictly on the facts as they are known it might be said that the *zamindars* occupied a quasi-official position and were rather in the nature of *jāgīrdārs* without *manṣab* and official duties.

The rate of assessment, as recorded by Abū al-Faḍl, was fixed at 1/3 of the total produce. This information refers to the year 1582 when a very small portion of Bengal came under the Mughal sway. Nevertheless this rate appears to have been followed more or less uniformly throughout the subsequent period. We have indeed the revenue figures of the Bengal *ṣūbāh* on three occasions. In the above-mentioned year the revenue of the whole of Bengal was stated to be 63,44,260 *tanka*.¹ Next, according to the settlement said to have been made by Prince Shujā' in 1658 the total revenue was estimated at 1,31,15,907 *tanka*,² the increase being chiefly ascribed to the annexation of new lands and the consequent extension of the limits of the *ṣūbah*. Finally, according to Murshid Qulī Khān's settlement, the figure is shown as 142,88,186 *tanka*.³ The increase upon the figure of Shujā's time was slight and it was due most probably to the transfer of many *jāgīrs* to *khalīṣa* lands as done by Murshid Qulī Khān. At any rate, looking at the latter two figures it may be stated that there is no basis for the suggestion that the rate of assessment was raised by emperor Aurangzeb from 1/3 to 1/2 of the produce.⁴ In fact an

¹ *Ain*. (tr. Jarrett), II., 141.

² James Grant, *Analysis of the Finances of Bengal in Fifth Report*, App. 4, 182-186.

³ *Ibid.*, 189-191. This figure is more or less the same as given in the other sources.

⁴ H. Moreland, *Agrarian System of Moslem India*, Cambridge, 1929, 135.

early English document relating to their zamindari possession of the 24-parganas district shows that the revenue payable per *bighā* of land was only 8 annas ($1/2$ *tanka*)¹ which, considering the then price of rice and the average productivity of the soil would amount to $1/4$ to $1/3$ of the produce. Though calculated on the basis of produce, revenue was collected in cash. There is hardly any instance of its being collected in kind in Bengal.

¹ J. Long, *Selections from the unpublished records of government from 1748-1767 inclusive*, Calcutta, 1869, No. 442. See also A. Karim, *op. cit.*, 86-88.

CHAPTER XXIX

FORMATION OF THE MUSLIM SOCIETY

I. THEORIES REGARDING THE ORIGIN OF BENGAL MUSLIMS

The most important result of more than five hundred years of continuous Muslim rule in Bengal has been the formation of a large Muslim population in the land. Whether this was due mainly to immigration and settlement of foreign Muslims in the country or to conversion of the local population to Islam is a question to which an answer can be attempted only by a reference to the instances of immigration and conversion that we come across in the contemporary or near-contemporary sources. Before doing that, however, it would be worthwhile to note briefly the main theories that have hitherto been propounded regarding the origin of Bengal Muslims.

The existence of a large Muslim population in Bengal was generally lost sight of following their loss of political power and the establishment of British rule in the country in the mid-eighteenth century. The new rulers, in consonance with their own position and, presumably, because they had captured power from a degenerate and isolated section of the Muslim nobility, aided by an influential Hindu mercantile group, naturally tended to assume that like themselves the Muslim rulers were only a handful of foreigners and that with their defeat and dispersal there remained none else of consequence in the country but the Hindus. The fact that there was indeed a vast body of Muslim population in the land besides and beyond the immediate group from whom power had been snatched escaped attention at that time. In fact till practically the last quarter of the nineteenth century the British rulers' policy in Bengal was largely based on that erroneous assumption. Even as late as the forties of the nineteenth century the British authorities in Bengal did not hesitate to call upon the Hindus to remain grateful to the new rulers for their having liberated them (Hindus) from what was called the "oppression" of the Muslims.¹

¹ See for instance the government reply of 24 May 1845 to the Hindu memorial protesting against the proposed Lex Loci Act, *Ind. Leg. Cons.*, 2 August 1845, No. 5. Also *Parl. Paper*, H.C., 1847, Vol. 43, Paper 14, pp. 644-649 (especially p. 646).

In the later part of the nineteenth century a number of circumstances combined to dispel this misconception. The "indigo revolt" of 1859-60 closely following the "mutiny and revolts" of 1857 served, *inter alia*, to attract the rulers' attention to the condition of the Bengal rural masses many of whom now appeared to be Muslims, especially in the "indigo districts." Then came the "*Jihād* investigations" of the late sixties which revealed a rather wide-spread but underground movement among Bengal Muslims directed against the British rulers. Then came the publication in 1871 of W.W. Hunter's *Indian Musalmans* which avowedly dealt with the attitude of Bengal Muslims in an Indian setting. Almost as a sequel to these developments was carried out the first census in 1872. Being the first of its kind it was necessarily defective in many respects. Particularly, the people were not aware of its purpose and utility and many, under a misapprehension that it was intended to impose new taxes or for taking reprisals on them for their alleged part in the "*Jihād* conspiracy," concealed their numbers and other particulars from the enumerators. Many of the tribal people and animists were also mistakenly classified and enumerated as Hindus. Nevertheless the census showed that of a total recorded population of 36,769,735 in Bengal proper, 16,370,967 were Muslims. The result was unexpected as well as revealing to government circles. "The discovery that nearly one-third of the population of these provinces [Bengal, Bihar and Orissa] profess the Muhammadan faith," noted H. Beverly, author of the Census Report, "is not only interesting in itself, but puts the character of the people in a new light altogether."¹ He sought an explanation of this rather unexpected phenomenon in "the conversion to Islam of the numerous low castes" which inhabited the land, suggesting that the "exclusive caste system of Hinduism" had reduced the "semi-amphibious aborigines of Bengal" into "merely the hewers of wood and drawers of water for a set of masters in whose eyes they were unclean beasts and altogether abominable", and that therefore these people naturally embraced Islam "which recog-

¹ *Report of the Census of Bengal, 1872*, para.525.

nized all men as equals.”¹ Beverly was unable, however, to find any concrete historical support for his supposition and also to offer any satisfactory answer to the question which suggested itself to the reader, that, if the rigours of the caste system were the main reasons for the low-class Hindus’ conversion to Islam in Bengal, why such should not have been the case in other areas of the subcontinent where Muslims had ruled for an equally long period and where the caste system was equally, if not more, rigorous and where low-class Hindus were far more numerous. He was conscious of these weaknesses in his approach; yet he pressed his theory on the attention of his readers thus: “It is not clear indeed that this conversion of the lower castes was more general in the part of the country of which we are treating than elsewhere, though of course the greater number of Mahommedans located between Gaur [Malda] and Ghoraghat [Rangpur] adds probability to the supposition. History is unfortunately silent on this subject of conversion.”² And by way of meeting the want of historical evidence in support of his contention Beverly finally adduced the argument of what he considered to be the similarity in the social position, physique, manners and customs between the Muslims and “their fellow-countrymen who still form the low castes of Hindus.”³

Thus was propounded for the first time the theory of low-class Hindu origin of Bengal Muslims. It was avowedly a mere “probability” and “supposition,” to use Beverly’s own expressions, and was not substantiated by any specific examples from history. Its greatest defect was that it totally ignored the important fact that for about six centuries various groups of Muslims from different countries, together with large numbers of their followers had successively come and ruled in the country and, unlike the British, had adopted the land and had settled in it. It is just unreasonable to think that the descendants of those large numbers of immigrants had not multiplied and had all died out. Beverly’s observation about the similarity in the physical features

¹ *Ibid.*, para 348.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*, paras 352-354.

and manners of the Muslims and the low-class Hindus is also superficial and faulty. There indeed was, and still today there is, remarkable differences in the physical features of many a Muslim of Bengal and those of the generality of the low-class Hindus. Also climate, environment, profession, poverty and stresses and strains of life through centuries have their inevitable effects on man's health and physical features. Nevertheless the theory, or rather the supposition, found a rather ready acceptance with other writers and authors of the ruling class mainly for three reasons. First, it indirectly tallied with their earlier assumption that the rulers whom they had supplanted were mere foreigners; for, as they were thought to be so, the other Muslims who were now found to be existing in large numbers in the land must necessarily be converts from the local people! Secondly, the supposition coincided also with the Christian missionary experience in Bengal. In spite of about one hundred years of organized and earnest evangelizing efforts in Bengal after the establishment of British rule, the Christian faith could gain converts in any appreciable number only from among the lower classes of the Hindus, and that also largely on account of the baneful effects of the caste system.¹ Thirdly, with the loss of political power and the various administrative and economic changes that followed, many Muslims including once great families had degenerated into abject poverty and humble situations in life so that on a cursory and superficial view they appeared indistinguishable from the poorer section of the rural Hindu population.

Beverly's theory was given an almost immediate support in E.T. Dalton's *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal* which was published from Calcutta in the same year. And when the two subsequent censuses taken only at ten yearly intervals, in 1881 and 1891, showed that the Muslims in Bengal were really more numerous than the Hindus - in the former year the recorded number of Muslims being 17,863,411 as against 17,245,120 Hindus, and in the latter year the number of Muslims being 19,582,481 as against 18,068,655 Hindus - the authors of the

¹ See for instance M.M. Ali, *The Bengali Reaction to Christian Missionary Activities, 1833-1857*, Chittagong, 1965, Chaps. V and IX.

census reports as also some Christian missionary observers¹ abruptly came to the conclusion that during the preceding two decades there had been substantial increase in the Muslim population due to conversion from the lower orders of the Hindus, although no concrete instance was cited to substantiate the assumption. There had of course been some increase by birth, but the difference in numbers in the latter two censuses really reflected a better management of the census operations and a greater cooperation on the part of the Muslims with the enumerators than had been the case on the first occasion. None of the persons concerned however considered this point at that time. C.J.O. Donnell, author of the Cenus Report for 1891 wrote: "In 1872 Muhammadans were nearly a million less than the Hindus in Bengal porper. Now they surpass them by a million and a half... It is statistically proved that since 1872, out of every 10,000 persons, Islam has gained 100 persons in North Bengal, 262 persons in Eastern Bengal and 110 in Western Bengal—on the average 157 persons in the whole of Bengal proper... The Musalman increase is real and large. If it were to continue, the faith of Muhammad would be universal in Bengal proper in six centuries and a half, while Eastern Bengal would reach the same condition in about six hundred years."² Even W.W. Hunter, whose *Indian Musalmans* had established his reputation as an expert on Indian Muslim affairs joined the chorus. In an article published in the London *Times* under caption "The Religions of India" he also rehearsed Beverly's theory thus; "To these poor people, fishermen, hunters, pirates, and low-caste tillers of the soil Islam came as revelation from on high. It was the creed of the ruling race, its missionaries were men of zeal who brought the Gospel of the unity of God and the equality of men in its sight to a despised and wretched population. The initiatory right rendered relapse impossible, made the proselyte and his posterity true believers for ever. In this way Islam settled down on the richest alluvial province of India, the province which was capable of

¹ See for instance the *Evangelical Review*, January, 1883, p. 278.

² *Census of India Report*, 1891, Vol. II, p. 2.

supporting the most rapid and densest increase of population."¹ What Hunter said about the spirit of equality in Islam is undoubtedly true, but the paradox in the discussion lay in the fact that it was elicited not by what had happened in the distant past but by the supposed increase of Muslims in Bengal during the period from 1872 to 1891 when neither were Muslims the rulers of the country nor were there any organized Islamic missionary activities comparable in any way to those of the Christian missionaries. Nor, as pointed out already, was any single instance of such conversion of a low-caste Hindu during the period mentioned by any of the writers.² Be that as it may, the theory was finally systematized and codified in 1892, so to say, by H.H. Risley in his *The Tribes and Castes of Bengal*, Vol. I. Risley gave an anthropological touch to his treatment by recording in the book the result of his measurement of nasal heights of the various classes of people including a number of Muslims on the basis of which he concluded that the Bengal Muslims were converts from the lowest classes of the Hindus.³

The Beverly-Risley theory was essentially an outcome of the rulers' rather sudden awareness about the existence of a large Muslim population in Bengal and of an equally hasty attempt to find an explanation for this unexpected phenomenon. Naturally the theory did not go unchallenged. The Muslim indignation at the unwarranted and obviously generalized assumption about their origin was expressed by Khundkar Fuzli Rubbee,⁴ *dīwān* to the then nominal Nawwāb of Murshidabad, and himself a Muslim of foreign extraction. After a study of the contemporary sources of Muslim Bengal history he prepared and published in 1893 a book in Persian under caption *Haqīqat-i-Musalmān-i-Bangālah*. An English translation of the book, entitled *The Origin of the Musalmans of Bengal*, was published in 1895. Rubbee emphasized that from the year 1203 when Muslim rule was first

¹ *The Times*, London, 25 February 1888, quoted in Arnold, *op.cit.*, pp.282-83.

² It is to be noted that the conversion of even a single Hindu of the lowest class to Christianity at the time occasioned loud protests and discussions in the Hindu-owned Calcutta newspapers. Any such conversion to Islam would not have gone unnoticed, if not challenged.

³ H.H. Risley, *The Tribes and Castes of Bengal*, Vol.I., Calcutta, 1892, p.91.

⁴ The name is written here as it appears on the title page of the book.

established in Bengal down to the year 1765 when the British acquired the *dīwānī*, that is for a period of 562 years, "the Muslim sway uninterruptedly prevailed in this country." During this long period "76 Musalman Governors, Kings and Nāzims successively ruled in Bengal. Out of these, 16 Governors held their appointments from the *Ghorī* and *Khaljī* Emperors, 26 were independent sovereigns, including the rulers who were contemporaneous with the reign of Sher Shāh, and the remaining 24 were Nāzims under the Mughal Emperors. The 76 rulers who governed this country during these 562 years, were all Afghan, Moghul, Iranian or Arab origin, except Kāns, Jalāl-ud-dīn Shāh, Ahmad Shāh and Rājāhs Todar Mall and Mānsingh. Owing to this foreign origin of its Sovereigns numbers of Musalmans of all classes and conditions came from Afghanistan, Turkistan, Iran, Arabia, distant parts of India and other countries, and settled in Bengal."¹ It was also the policy of those rulers to "induce men belonging to their own race and creed to come from all parts of the world and settle in their dominions, with a view to increase and strengthen their own power and position; and with these men they peopled towns, villages and hamlets."² In support of this statement he cited the existence of numerous towns, villages, market-places, *parganas* and districts named after Muslim settlers and also of the variety and vast numbers of rent-free lands even down to the second century of British rule.³ Calling in question the innuendo in Beverly's and others' writings that Islam was forcibly imposed by the Muslim rulers upon the low-class local population Rubbee pointed out, among other historical facts, that if such was ever the case, the higher classes also would have been forced to do so, for the latter in reality "held a position of rivalry with the Musalmans."⁴ On the question of the physical features of Bengal Muslims he stated that whatever might have been the racial and other characteristics of the original Muslim settlers, these had necessarily undergone

¹ Khundkar Fuzli Rubbee, *The Origin of the Musalmans of Bengal*, Calcutta, 1895, reproduced in *Journal of the East Pakistan History Association*, Vol.I, No.1, March, 1968, Appendix A., pp.6, 11-12.

² *Ibid.*, p.24.

³ *Ibid.*, pp.26-28.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p.30.

considerable changes "owing to their intermingling with other races and from the effects of climate, soil, food and modes of life, and in consequence of their professions and habits" during a long process of time, coupled with a hard life and poverty which had overtaken them during the preceding century and a half.¹ Yet, he maintained, there "exists a material difference between the physical constitution and appearances of those Musalmans of Bengal who are descended from Arabs and Ajams and the Hindus of this country."² Rubbee also cited some specific instances of immigration of Muslims into Bengal.

His most interesting and revealing criticisms were directed, however, against Risley's anthropological approach. Giving him credit for whatever his book was worth, Rubbee held that that gentleman had done great injustice to the Muslims while recording their nasal index, which he considered to be the most distinguishing race characteristic, in that he had "dealt with the Hindu community according to the order of its organisation deducing results of measurements separately for each of the castes into which the community is divided according to the various professions of the men. But with reference to the Musalmans, he had treated them *en masse* without any regard to their races and professions, working out but one result for the whole community in general." Thus he had noted the average nasal height of 12 Hindu "castes" or professional groups, whereas he worked out only one figure under the general caption "Musalmans". Correct results from comparison, pointed out Rubbee, "are obtainable only when the average result of the physical examinations" of persons professing one calling or belonging to one rank and class was compared with that of an equal number of men of any other race pursuing the same profession or belonging to a similar rank. Even taking Risley's figures as they were, stated Rubbee, an averaging of the 12 figures given for the Hindus would give quite a new turn to the results in favour of the Muslims. More revealing was Rubbee's disclosures about the way in which Risley had made his selection of Muslims for his measurement. "The names of the

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 46-47.

² *Ibid.*, p. 46.

subjects mentioned in the book engendered the suspicion that none but the lowest orders of Musalmans were examined;" wrote Rubbee, "and in order to satisfy myself in this point, I interrogated on the subject the Hospital Assiatant, Babu Komod Behari Samanta, who during the operations assisted Mr. Risley, and to whom the work of the anthropological measurements of the subjects in Bengal was exclusively entrusted. I learnt from him that he purposely did not take the measurements of any Musalman of birth, position and respectability, but only of their lowest classes, because he said it was the express order of Mr. Risley to take measurements of only the low class Musalmans of Eastern Bengal, and of these not even to examine nor include in the records of his examinations the physical measurements of such as possessed regular features. For this reason he visited some of the jails of the Eastern Districts of Bengal, and took the measurements of some prisoners therein, and transmitted them to Mr. Risley, by whom they were ultimately embodied in his work under notice... Komod Babu himself says that the nature of the order is an inexplicable mystery to him. Under these circumstances how can Mr. Riseley's opinion regarding the Musalmans be just and favourable to them"?¹ Thus pointing out the defects and inaccuracies in Beverly's and Risely's assumptions Rubbee emphasized that "it is owing to the country remaining under Musalman sway for nearly six hundred years that Musalmans are now to be found here in such overwhelming numbers. Likewise it would be more consistent with reason to think that the comparatively larger number of Musalmans that inhabit the district of Malda, within which lie the ruins of Gaur and the adjacent districts, are the descendants of the population of that old Musalman capital. The Musalman capital in Bengal was at first at Gaur. The capital was subsequently removed to Rajmahal. From Rajmahal it was removed to Dacca, and from Dacca to Murshidabad. A vast number of Musalmans will be found in all these districts and the surrounding ones. It also appears from this that probably all these Musalmans, or at least the major portion of

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

them, are the descendants of the ruling races who successively governed these countries." ¹ Rubbee rounded up his discussion by an account of some of the ancient Muslim families and their occupations at that time. He also urged the government to "repair the wrong" done to the Muslims by Beverley's and Risley's writings and called upon the former "that the question at issue, viz., that of our origin and ancestry be thoroughly enquired with the help of the light afforded by history and that the results of such investigations may be placed on record." ²

Probably because of this and other criticisms which might have been made at the time, the government had a circular made at the time of the next census in 1901 calling upon, among others, Hindu and Muslim officials and prominent men in different districts of Bengal to submit their views regarding the origin and character of the peoples in their respective localities. In response to this circular a large number of Muslim officers and private persons transmitted rather voluminous communications to H. Risley who was then in charge of the census operations. ³ These communications generally reflected what Fuzli Rubbee had said. Unfortunately these views were not embodied in the census report which was subsequently published. Also, unlike Beverley's and Risley's writings, Rubbee's book did not receive any government patronage. Necessarily therefore its circulation remained limited, and the views and arguments contained in it did not reach even the very few subsequent writers who had occasion to refer to the subject. That at least was the case with T.W. Arnold's *The Preaching of Islam* which was published in 1897 and in which the author, while dealing with the spread of Islam in Bengal, only reproduced the Beverley-Risley theory, quoting copiously from Hunter and the Census Reports. ⁴

The Beverley-Risley theory about the origin of Bengal Muslims is clearly a one-sided and an extreme view, and in this

¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 32-33.

² *Ibid.*, p. 34.

³ See especially MSS. Eur. E. 295/17 (Risley Collection, India Office Library. I am grateful to Professor S.A. Akhand for this reference).

⁴ T.W. Arnold, *The Preaching of Islam*, second edition, 1913. (Lahore reprint, 1961), pp. 280-283, 291.

context Rubbee's work, though it tends to lean to the other extreme, is undoubtedly a balancing element. It is indeed difficult to be dogmatic on the subject, especially after the lapse of so much time and the paucity of reliable information. Yet the truth can be approximated by a reference to whatever instances of immigration of Muslims from other lands and of conversion of local people to Islam that are to be met with in the contemporary and near-contemporary sources.

II: IMMIGRATION OF MUSLIMS INTO BENGAL

Instances of immigration of Muslims from other countries into Bengal and of their having settled there are, at any rate, more numerous and direct than those of conversion from the local population. The establishment of Muslim rule in India and Bengal, as already pointed out, was in fact due to that exodus of princes, chiefs, adventurers and their large retinues set in motion by the Mongol eruption and the consequent political instability and turmoil in the Central Asian lands. Ikhtiyār al-Dīn Muḥammad Bakhtiyār Khaljī, founder of the Muslim dominion in Bengal, came at the head of one such large group of adventurers. Minhāj states that hearing about Ikhtiyār al-Dīn's military successes in Bihar, many men belonging to the Khaljī tribe flocked to his standard.¹ It was this increase in the number of his followers that encouraged him to extend his sway into Bengal. The size of his followers may be guessed from the fact that, according to the same authority, ten thousand chosen troops accompanied him in his Tibet expedition.² The adventure failed and a majority of them perished; but a good number of survivors returned to Deokot to join their families and those of the others who had been left there. Moreover, three of Ikhtiyār al-Dīn's principal lieutenants, Muḥammad Shīrān, Ḥusām al-Dīn 'Iwāḍ and 'Alī Mardān were left behind, each with a sufficient number of troops to look after the administration and defence respectively of the south-west, western and north-east regions of the newly founded Muslim dominion. All these people settled in the country.

¹ *Tabaqāt-i-Nāṣirī* (tr. Raverty), Vol. I, p. 551.

² *Ibid.*, 560.

The establishment of the new dominions of Islam in the east at a time when the Mongols were carrying everything before them in Iran and Central Asia offered a welcome opportunity to many uprooted families, merchants, learned men, artisans, craftsmen and others to move out of troubles and to find shelter and homes in north India and Bengal. "Notwithstanding that by the will of the Almighty and the decrees of destiny the turn of sovereignty passed into Chengiz Khan, the Accursed, and his descendants, after the Kings of Iran and Turan...", writes Minhāj, "the kingdom of Hindustan, by the grace of Almighty and the favour of fortune... became the focus of the people of Islam, and the orbit of the possessors of religion."¹ Thus, besides military adventurers and troops, persons of peaceful pursuits, learned men and *shaikhs* came almost immediately in the wake of Ikhtiyār al-Dīn's conquests. "There were two brothers of Farghana, men of learning, one Nizām-ud-Dīn, and the other Samsam-ud-Dīn [by name], in the service of Muhammad-i-Bakhtyar; and the author of this book," further writes Minhāj, "met with Samsam-ud-Din at Lakhnawati in the year 641 H., and this account is from him."² It is further mentioned that among the first administrative and public measures of the conqueror was the erection of a number of mosques and abodes for learned men and *shaikhs*.

The earnestness with which the new-comers adhered to the land is shown by the fact that after Ikhtiyār al-Dīn's death (1206 A.C.) his three above-mentioned lieutenants, instead of leaving the country, engaged themselves in a struggle for becoming the supreme master over it. In doing so each of them attempted to strengthen his position by drawing new recruits from outside. And even when any of the contestants was defeated he did not leave the land but retired with his followers to a distant and safer part of it. Thus Muhammad Shīrān, after his overthrow from power, withdrew with his followers towards the Santosh region of Bogra and settled there. Muhammad Shīrān lies buried at Santosh. 'Alī Mardān Khaljī, who had temporarily gone to

¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 869-878.

² *Ibid.*, 552.

Dlehi to seek Qutb al-Dīn's help, came back, as one writer puts it, "as the leader of a second and mightier wave of Turkish migration."¹ 'Alī Mardān was, however, soon overthrown and succeeded by Ḥusām al-Dīn 'Iwāḍ who reigned for 14 years under the title of Sulṭān Ghiyāth al-Dīn 'Iwāḍ Khaljī. His reign witnessed an extension of the Muslim dominion and its consolidation.² This attracted more foreign Muslims into the country whom he welcomed and had them settled in the land. His reign coincided with that of Sulṭān Ilutmish at Delhi and the invasion of Chengiz Khān in Persia and Afghanistan. At that time many princely families and others sought asylum in India. Some of those uprooted people had also trekked into Bengal. Minhāj speaks eloquently of Ghiyāth al-Dīn 'Iwāḍ's liberal patronage of, and his bestowal of financial grants and pensions upon the 'ulamā', the *shaikhs*, the *Sayyids* (descendants of the Prophet) and others who thronged his court.³

From Ghiyāth al-Dīn 'Iwāḍ's death in 624 H./1227 A.C. till the establishment of the Khaljī dynasty at Delhi in 698 H./1290 A.C. the Lakhnawatī territory was ruled by governors either appointed by the Delhi Sulṭān or owing allegiance to him. This opened the gate for further incoming of Muslim officials and their retinues into Bengal. Two notable features of the period were that, on the one hand, the governors who were appointed over Bengal often settled in the land with their supporters and, on the other, other Delhi governors in northern India, whenever they found an opportunity to do so, marched upon Bengal and established their authority there, relinquishing their possessions in northern India. The instances of the Bihar governor Ṭughral Ṭughān Khān's capture of the Bengal governorship in 633 H./1236, of the Oudh governor Tamar Khān's doing the same thing in 642 H./1245, and of the Kara (Allahabad) governor Malīk Tāj al-Dīn Arslan Khān's repeating the same feat in 657 H./1254 A.C. have been mentioned above. Even the royal princes of Delhi were not immune from Bengal's attraction. Sulṭān Ilutmish's son

¹ H.B.II.

² *Supra*, pp.84-89.

³ *Tabaqāt* (tr.), Vol.I.,p.583.

Prince Nāṣir al-Dīn ruled and died in Bengal leaving his descendants and other followers to stay there; and Sultān Balban's son Prince Bughra Khān, who ruled over Bengal from 680-690/1281-1290 preferred the Lakhnawatī throne to that of Delhi and founded a new dynasty of rulers in the former territory when the Khaljīs took over at Delhi. Such attraction for Bengal was no doubt due to its resources and wealth, its abundance of land because of its then very sparse population, for the settlement of the newcomers and, above all, the security and stability which it offered, being away from the orbits of the Mongol threats from the north-west and the political turmoils at Delhi. In fact the Lakhnawatī dominion at that time came to occupy almost a position of rivalry with the Delhi Sultānat itself in respect of prosperity and grandeur. Two of the rulers of Lakhnawatī, Prince Nāṣir al-Dīn and Malīk Jalāl al-Dīn Mas'ūd Jānī, bore the title of *Malīk al-sharq* or Lord of the East. Ṭughrāl Ṭughān Khān's assumption of the title of *Mughīth al-Mulūk wa al-Salātīn*¹ (Protector of Kings and Sultāns) is only explicable against the background of a number of uprooted Central Asian princes and nobles who must have found asylum in Bengal.

The Khaljī revolution at Delhi (690 H./1290 A.C.) in its turn caused another wave of migration of the ousted Ilbarī Turkish nobles to Bengal where Bughra Khān (Balban's son) and his descendants now continued to rule independently. For their own safety the Khaljī rulers exiled also the remainder of the Balbanī nobles and their supporters to Bengal. The story of Jalāl al-Dīn Fīrūz Khaljī's having despatched boat-loads of such undesirables to Bengal is well known, and it is stated that nearly 1000 of such persons came in a lot.² According to one view, the numerous *shaikhs* and *ghāzīs* who are found during this period to have been instrumental in a large measure in extending the frontiers of Muslim Bengal was due to this new influx of Muslims there. It has been very plausibly suggested that the easiest way for the Sultāns of Bengal to absorb such wholesale deportation "was to enrol these men in a 'Foreign Legion' and utilize them in warring"

¹ Bihar Inscription dated 640 H, J.A.S.B., 1873, pp.245-246. Also *supra*, p.94.

² Baranī, *Tārīkh-i-Fīrūzshāhī*, p.141.

on the frontiers of Bengal.¹ The presence in Bengal of a number of refugee princes and nobles from different places might also be the reason for Sultān Kāikā'ūs's (689-701/1290-1301) assumption of the grandiloquent title of "Master of the princes of the Turks and the Persians".² The Khaljīs at Delhi were soon supplanted by the Tughlaqs in 720 H./1320 A.C. resulting in another exodus of nobles from there to Bengal. Even mutual rivalry among the Tughlaqs themselves sometimes led to the same result. According to Ibn Baṭūṭa, after Juna Khān's unsuccessful rebellion against his father Ghiyāth al-Dīn Tughlaq, the latter inflicted severe punishment upon some of the former's partisans so that the "other *amirs* fled to Sultān Shams al-Dīn, son of Sultān Nāṣir al-Dīn [Bughra Khān], son of Sultān Ghiyāth al-Dīn Balban, and established themselves at his court" in Bengal.³ Muḥammad Tughlaq, in order to tighten his hold over this eastern province, placed three joint-governors with increased troops and officers over Lakhnawātī, Sunārgāon and Sāt-gāon regions. All of them stayed in the country. Even natural calamities contributed to the same process. When the capital of Delhi and its vicinity was twice visited by severe famines and Muḥammad Tughlaq's relief measures failed to cope with the situation, he ordered the city "gates to be thrown open and to let the inhabitants...go whithersoever they chose. Most of them with their families and dependents betook themselves at this time to Bengal."⁴ Again, when the Oudh governor Yamīn al-Mulk's rebellion failed, many of his supporters and soldiers who survived the Tughlaq Sultān's wrath made their escape to Bengal.⁵

The influx of various groups of Muslims in Bengal during the Khaljī and Tughlaq rule at Delhi resulted in a new struggle for power in the former territory which ended with the establishment of the Ilyās Shāhī dynasty in 734 H./1342 A.C. Ḥājī Ilyās, founder of the dynasty which ruled in Bengal for about a century and a half with the exception of a short interval, was an immigrant

¹ Stapleton, *J.A.S.B.*, N.S., XVIII, 1922, pp. 41, 414, 415. See also *supra*, pp. 103-104.

² Lakhisarai Inscription of Kaikā'ūs, *J.A.S.B.*, 1873, pp. 247-248; *E.I.M.*, 1917-1918, pp. 10-11.

³ Ibn Baṭūṭa, *Rihla*, Arabic text, Beirut print, 1964, p. 439.

⁴ *Tabaqāt-i-Akbārī*, quoted in *Origin etc.*, *op.cit.*, p. 15.

⁵ *Tārīkh-i-Firishta*, p. 139.

noble from Sijistān.¹ He was undoubtedly the leader of an important group who accompanied him. The Ilyās Shāhī period, as noted previously, was a period of peace and progress coinciding, in contrast, with a period of political weakness and troubles at Delhi. There the death of Firūz Shāh Tughlaq in 1388 A.C. followed ten years later by the devastating invasion of Timur-i-Lang (1398 A.C.) brought in a period of instability and troubles which continued throughout the succeeding rule of the Sayyids and the Lūdīs. This situation induced many to move to the peaceful region of Bengal. Thus it was that the Ilyās Shāhī period witnessed a steady increase of Muslim population and settlement in the land. Ibn Baṭūṭa, who visited east Bengal and Assam early in the period,² makes mention among other things of an unusually large number of wandering *faqīrs* in the country. They were obviously the uprooted Muslims who had poured into Bengal at that time. Ibn Baṭūṭa further mentions that the east Bengal ruler Fakhr al-Dīn had appointed as his deputy at Sadkāwān (Chittagong) one such *faqīr* named Shāida who, however, along with other *faqīrs* made an unsuccessful attempt to capture the government of that part of the country.³ This shows that those *faqīrs* were not just ordinary beggars or men having no political background or ambitions. Shaikh 'Alā' al-Ḥaḡ, a noted scholar and preacher claiming descent from the celebrated Muslim hero Khālīd ibn-al-Walīd came to Bengal during that time and settled at Pandua, the capital. It is stated that he used to maintain so large a number of his followers and *faqīrs* that the Sultān, Sikandar Shāh (759-792/1358-1398), grew jealous of his popularity and banished him to Sunārgāon (Dacca) in eastern Bengal.⁴ Presumably the Shāida incident was not unknown to Sikandar Shāh who apprehended a repetition of it at Pandua. Shaikh 'Alā' al-Ḥaḡ was, however, a different sort and he was subsequently allowed to return to the capital where he lived the rest of his life. Ghiyāth al-Dīn A'ẓam Shāh (792-814/1389-1410), the greatest

¹ Al-Sakhāwī, *Al-Daw' al-Lāmi'*, Cairo, 1303 H. edition, Part.II, p.313.

² *Supra*, pp.124-130.

³ Ibn Baṭūṭa *op.cit.*, p. 615. See also *supra*.

⁴ *Supra*, pp.127-128.

ruler of the dynasty, is noted for his patronage of the *shaikhs* and the learned whom he encouraged to come from other countries and live at his court. That some Abyssinian Muslims had found their way into Bengal during A'zam Shāh's reign is well attested by the latter's having deputed a trustworthy Abyssinian, Yāqūt by name, to distribute gifts and build *madrasas* at the holy cities of Makka and Madina.¹ Rājā Kāns's usurpation of the throne shortly after A'zam Shāh's death and the circumstances of his son's conversion to Islam and accession to the throne under the name of Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad, in which Shaikh 'Alā' al-Ḥaq's son and intellectual successor Shaikh Nūr Qutb al-'Ālam played an important role, indicates, *inter alia*, that Muslims had by then become a decisive factor in the country's population and politics.

The experience of Rājā Kāns's usurpation was not lost upon the restored Ilyās Shāhīs who appear to have followed a systematic policy of colonization and settlement of Muslims from other countries in Bengal. An account of the prominent pioneers of such colonization and settlement is given in the following section of this chapter. It may be noted here, however, that during the later Ilyās Shāhī ruler Nāṣir al-Dīn Maḥmūd's reign important Muslim settlements were established in the southern region of the country. Thus one Khān Jahān established extensive Muslim settlements in the southern part of modern Khulna district, (previously included in the Jessore district). His operations included the clearing and bringing under habitation of large areas of the Sundarban forests. Speaking about his achievements Blochmann writes: "Going up the Kabatak [river], in Jessore, we come to Amadi. To the north of which, in the immediate neighbourhood, we have Masidkur, a corruption of Masjidkur, one of the clearances of Khān Jahān (died A.D. 1459), the warrior saint [*shaikh*]² of Khalifatabad or Southern Jessore, to whom the traditions of the present day point as an indefatigable establisher of Sundarbanabadis (clearances).... It is the country round about

¹ *Supra*, pp. 142-143.

² Western writers generally refer to the Muslim *shaikhs* and *ghazis* of the south Asian subcontinent as "saints"; and following these writers Indo-Pakistani writers also refer to these personages as "saints". It must be emphasized that there is no sainthood in Islam and that all the contemporary records, inscriptions and books, speak of them as *shaikhs* and *ghazis* only.

Bagerhat, which up to the end of the last century bore the name given it in the *Āin*, 'Haweli Khalifatabad', the 'Vicegerent's Clearance.'"¹ Similarly Maḥmūd's successor Rukn al-Dīn Bār-bak's time witnessed the establishment of Muslim settlements in Barisal district.² The latter also employed a large number of Abyssinians in the army and other departments, totalling at least eight thousand. A number of Arabs are also found to have come and settled in Bengal during Rukn al-Dīn Barbāk's time. Both literary sources and traditions speak of a Quraishite Arab hero, Shāh Ismā'il Ghāzī who, along with some one hundred and twenty of his associates and others were instrumental in establishing Muslim settlements at Madaran (Hugli) and Kantaduar (Rangpur) regions.³ In fact the manuscript history concerning this *ghāzī* was discovered in 1874 by the British civil servant G.H. Damant from the caretaker of Shāh Ismā'il's tomb at Kantaduar, who claimed himself to be the descendant of one of the servants of Ismā'il who came with him from Arabia."⁴ Significantly enough, both the literary evidence and tradition speak of the Sultān's having grown jealous of Shāh Ismā'il Ghāzī's power and influence and of having ultimately executed him. This information only shows that as on the eve of Ilyās Shāh's coming to power, so towards the end of the rule of his dynasty a new factor in the balance of political power in the country was emerging on account of the arrival of fresh and influential foreign Muslims into Bengal. This is too evident from the Abyssinians' taking over the Sultānat shortly afterwards and the rule of four of their numbers in succession from 892-896/1486-1490. The Arab immigrant Muslims, however, soon gained the upper hand and in the latter year Sayyid Husain, the last Abyssinian ruler's minister and leader of the Arab group, led a successful revolt against the Abyssinians and established a new dynasty known as the Husainī or Husain Shāhī dynasty. Although this led to the expulsion of most of the Abyssinians from Bengal, some of their less prominent numbers

¹ *J.A.S.B.*, 1873, No. 3, p. 227. See also Khan Jahān's Inscriptions, *ibid.*, 1867, pp. 130-135.

² Mirzaganj Inscription, 870-1465, *J.A.S.B.*, 1860, p. 407.

³ *Risālat al-Shuhadā'*, in *J.A.S.B.*, 1874, pp. 215-239.

⁴ *Ibid.* The tradition ascribes Ismā'il Ghāzī, however, to the time of 'Alā' al-Dīn Husain Shāh, which does not appear to be correct in view of the facts contained in the *Risālat al-Shuhadā'*.

must have continued to live in the land.

Sayyid Ḥusain, or 'Alā' al-Dīn Ḥusain Shāh, the founder of the dynasty, appears from the Portuguese sources to have come to Bengal with five hundred of his Arab followers.¹ Later in his reign, when he was engaged in expelling the Arakanese from Chittagong, he was assisted by a great Arab merchant, Alfa Ḥusainī, who possessed "much wealth and many slaves and owned fourteen ships."² It is further stated that Alfa Ḥusainī, "for this reason, became the king's son-in-law and lived honoured and distinguished." "In fact", writes the author of the *Tārīkh-i-Ḥamīdī*, "upto the beginning of the present time, his descendants were the aristocracy here [Chittagong], and the late Mīr Yaḥyā Islāmābādī, founder of the well-known Madrasah, Mulla Mu'īnuddīn Sondīpī, and others, traced their descent from Ḥusainī."³ 'Alā' al-Dīn Ḥusain Shāh is also known to have appointed in state services many "Sayyids, Mughals and Afghans." Most probably these were new arrivals from Delhi because of the overthrow of the Sayyid dynasty there by the Lūdīs at that time. The construction of a large number of mosques in Bengal during the Ḥusainī period, particularly during 'Alā' al-Dīn Ḥusain Shāh's reign,⁴ point to a steadily increasing Muslim population mainly because of the settlement of immigrant Muslims. This is particularly evident from the names of the founders of these mosques recorded in the inscriptions discovered on them. The accession of Ḥusain Shāh in Bengal almost coincided with the break-up of the Jaunpur Sultānat under pressure from the Lūdīs of Delhi; and the fugitive Sultān Ḥusain Shāh Sharqī of Jaunpur, along with a number of his followers found shelter in the dominion of his namesake in Bengal where they settled. The Lūdīs had their nemesis soon enough at the hands of Bābur in the battle of Panipat, 1526 A.C., and it was now their turn to seek asylum in Bengal. A large number of Afghan nobles (Lūdīs) with their families and followers sought

¹ J. de Barros, *Da Asia*, quoted in *J.A.S.B.*, 1873, No. 3, p. 287. See also *supra*.

² Maulavi Ḥāmidullah Khān Bahādur, *Aḥādīth al-Khawānīn (Tārīkh-i-Ḥamīdī)*, Calcutta, 1871, pp. 17-18, quoted in *J.A.S.B.*, 1872, pp. 336-337.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ See *supra*, pp. 207-209.

the protection of Nuṣrat Shāh, Ḥusain Shāh's successor, who bestowed on all of them "parganahs and villages, in accordance with their respective rank and condition",¹ and himself married the deceased Sultān Ibrāhīm Lūdī's daughter who had come to Bengal.²

The process of immigration and settlement continued during the periods of Afghan and Mughal rule as well. Sher Shāh, the Afghan hero, divided Bengal into a number of units and settled his trusted men with their retinues over them. It has been very reasonably suggested that "the jagirs created by Sher became the nucleus of those petty principalities that waged a stubborn warfare against the Mughals, during Akbar's and Jahangir's reign."³ The "settlement of Pathan jagirdars, before and after the time of Sher Shah, as a standing militia against the inroads of the tribes of Jharkhand (Chutia Nagpur)," writes Blochmann, "led to the formation of the great Muhammadan zamindari of Birbhum, which gave the E.I. Company some trouble."⁴ Da'ūd Shāh, the last Afghan ruler in Bengal, had a very large retinue of followers and servants, besides an army consisting of 40,000 well-mounted cavalry, 3300 elephants and 140,000 infantry. After their submission to the Mughals, most of the Afghans were allowed to settle in Bengal, though the extent and number of their *jāgīrs* and rent-free holdings were reduced or subjected to nominal rents.

The establishment of Mughal rule did not mean that those Muslims who had come and settled in the land were in any way obliged to leave it. On the contrary, those who had been politically active merely withdrew themselves from the main cities and retired into the interior of the country. Their places in the administrative headquarters were taken by the Mughal viceroys, officers and troops. Cities like Rajmahal, Dacca and Murshidabad came up mainly as Mughal administrative headquarters and settlements. During the reigns of Jahāngīr and Shāh Jahān the Mughal viceroys generally held office for a term of years in Bengal; but even then many of the subordinate officers and

¹ See *supra*, p. 217.

² *Riyād*, p. 132.

³ *H.B.*, II., 177. See also Chap. I above.

⁴ *J.A.S.B.*, 1873, No. 3, 222-223.

their descendants remained and settled in the country. In Dacca, for instance, such a number of Armenian merchants settled that the locality came to be known as Armenitola, which name the area still bears. Even during Akbar's time a number of '*ulamā*' and *shaikhs* whose views were disagreeable to him were obliged to withdraw to the eastern provinces including Bengal.¹ Shāh Jahān's second son Shāh Shujā' held the governorship of Bengal with a large number of his officers and adherents. After his defeat in the war of succession with Aurangzeb Shujā' made his fateful escape with his family to Arakan; but many of his adherents scattered and settled in the interior of the eastern districts of Bengal. From the later part of Aurangzeb's reign, particularly with the viceroyalty of Kartalab (Murshid Qulī) Khān, all the Mughal viceroys settled and remained in Bengal. Murshid Qulī Khān, his son-in-law Shujā' al-Dīn Khān and 'Alīvardī Khān all came with a large number of their relatives, friends and soldiers. With the exception of a part of 'Alīvardī Khān's Afghan soldiers brought from Bihar, all these people and their descendants settled in the country. The *Siyar* makes special mention of a large number of learned men who came to Bengal during 'Alīvardī Khān's time and settled there.² Nādir Shāh's invasion and sack of Delhi and its vicinity (1739 A.C.) led a large number of people to migrate to Bengal and seek asylum with Nawwāb Shujā' al-Dīn Muḥammad Khān.³ It is on record that he was especially kind to strangers and newcomers who came to his court, and made all sorts of provisions for their stay and settlement in the country.⁴ The family and relatives of Sayed Ameer Ali, who played an important part in the intellectual and political life of Bengal Muslims in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, came in the wake of Nādir Shāh's invasion.⁵ Like their predecessors, the Mughal rulers and viceroys used to grant rent-free lands to noble families, learned men and *shaikhs*, as also for the maintenance of mosques, *madrasas* and similar institutions. According to a late

¹ Badāyūnī, *Muntakhab al-Tawārikh*, p.278.

² *Siyar*, II., 165-185.

³ *Tārikh-i-Mansurī*, quoted in Fuzli Rubbee, *op.cit.*, 19-20.

⁴ *Siyar*, II., 323-324.

⁵ *Memoirs of Ameer Ali*, (ed. S.R. Wasti), Lahore, 1968, pp.6-7.

nineteenth century estimate, there were at that time more than 20 varieties of such rent-free holdings in Bengal. When the country passed under British rule most of those rent-free lands were resumed by a series of sweeping regulations. Yet, as late as the close of the nineteenth century there were 700 lots of rent-free lands in the district of Murshidabad, 649 lots in Bogra, 1705 lots in Burdwan, 894 in Hugli,¹ besides similar numbers in other districts. This fact alone indicates the number and extent of immigrant noble and learned families who settled in Bengal. It has already been mentioned that numerous *parganās*, villages, towns, hamlets, and other parts of the country bear the names of their original settlers and owners. Even after the establishment of British rule many Muslims from other parts of the subcontinent came and settled in Bengal on account either of the Maratha depredations or of the political turmoil that overtook northern India at that time. The British themselves brought a number of dispossessed Muslim princes and nobles in Calcutta where they settled. The sons of Tipu Sulṭān and the Oudh princes were thus settled in Calcutta. The descendants of these princes together with another Muslim of foreign origin named 'Abd al-Laṭīf were instrumental in establishing the first Muslim literary-cum-political organization in Bengal in the nineteenth century.² Ḥājī Muḥammad Moḥsin, the well-known Muslim philanthropist of Hugli, was a Persian Muslim who had settled there early in the British period. Muslim merchants and traders from different countries also thronged to Calcutta. There was a flourishing colony of Egyptian merchants in the city which came to be known as Misri-Ganj which name the locality still bears. The Khwāja family of Dacca, the Khan-Panni, the Yusufzai, the Ghaznavī and other Muslim zamindar families of Mymensingh

¹ Rubbee, *op.cit.*, p.38.

² See *Abstract of Proceedings of the Mahomedan Literary Society of Calcutta*, Calcutta, 1871, and *A Quarter Century of the Mahomedan Literary Society of Calcutta*, Calcutta, 1898, both reproduced in *Nawab Abdul Latif Khan Bahadur: Autobiography and other Writings* (ed. M.M. Ali), Dacca, July, 1968, pp.107-156. The Committee of Management of the Society included, among others whose names clearly suggest their foreign origin, Prince Muhammad Rahim al-Din, Prince Muhammad Nasir al-Din Hayder, Prince Muhammad Harmuz Shah and Prince Mirza Jahan Qadir Bahadur, Prince Mirza Asman Jah Bahadur, and Prince Mirza Muhammad Jah Ali Bahadur, of the Oudh Family.

and Tippera, the Mirzās of Rajshahi, the Sayyids of Jessore and Khulna, to mention only a few, all are of foreign origin. In fact in all the districts and localities of Bengal there are still many Muslim families who trace their descent from settlers who had come from other Muslim countries like Arabia, Yaman, Afghanistan, Asia Minor, Iran, Turkey, etc.¹ The scope of the present work would not allow the inclusion of a list of all such families. Suffice it to say that even a cursory glance at the history of the land would warrant the conclusion that of all places in the south Asian subcontinent it was perhaps in Bengal that more Muslims of foreign origin settled during about six hundred years of continuous Muslim rule there.

III. PIONEERS OF SETTLEMENT AND PREACHING

Reference has already been made to preacher-settlers like Shāh Ismā'īl Ghāzī and Khān Jahān, and also to the group of *shaikhs* and *'ulamā'* belonging to the school of Shaikh 'Alā' al-Haq and his son Shaikh Nūr Quṭb al-'Ālam.² There were however many others. Traces of these men are still available in their tombs scattered all over Bengal and the mosques erected either contemporaneously or subsequently at or near those spots. Many of those personalities have in the process of time been depicted by popular imagination as legendary figures; but the numerous inscriptions found at or near their last resting places establish them as historical personalities who came to Bengal not as temporary and wandering missionaries of Islam, but rather as leaders of bands of settlers from foreign parts. The missionary aspect of their activities has been more or less uniformly emphasized to the neglect of the other equally if not more important aspect of their activities, which was colonization and settlement of Muslims in the different parts of the country. For one thing, unlike usual itinerant preachers, they did not come here simply on temporary missionary tours, but were accompanied almost invariably by bands of followers with whom they settled in the land. Both epigraphic records and legends unmistakably indicate this aspect of their careers.

One of the earliest such preacher-settlers to come to Bengal

¹ See Chap. XV for the Bāra Bhuiyāns and others who settled in Bengal.

² *Supra*, pp. 139, 140, 142.

was Shaikh Jalāl Muḥammad Tabrīzī. Originally an inhabitant of Tabrīz in Persia, as his name clearly shows, he is said to have been a disciple of the well-known Shaikh Shihāb al-Dīn Suhrawardī, and to have come to Bengal during the reign of the Delhi Sultān Iltutmish (1210-1236 A.C.). A group of ancient buildings including his mausoleum and a *jāmi'* mosque at Pandua bear an eloquent testimony to the elaborate establishments of this Shaikh at the then capital of Muslim Bengal.¹ While at Deotala, about 20 miles to the north, his companions and followers who came with him settled in such numbers that the place came to be known as "Tabrīzābād" (Tabrīz Colony or town) and as the "Town of Shaikh Jalāl Muḥammad Tabrīzī." One of the main grounds on which Sultān Ibrāhīm Sharqī of Jaunpur was urged to interfere in Bengal affairs during Kāns's usurpation² was that, among other distinguished Muslim settlers there, Deotala was the abode and resting place of a large number of *shaikhs* belonging to what was called the "Jalālia Order."³ At least four inscriptions belonging to the reigns of three Sultāns record the construction of four mosques at Deotala. Thus, during Sultān Rukn al-Dīn Bārbak Shāh's reign (864-878 H./1459-1474 A.C.) a *jāmi'* mosque was erected there in 868 H./1464 A.C. by one Ulugh Mubārit Khān who called the place "Tabrīzābād."⁴ Another inscription belonging to the same reign and recording the construction of another mosque describes the place as "the blessed town of Tabrīzābād, generally known as Deotala" (في القصبه المباركة تبريز اباد عرف) (ديوتلا).⁵ A third inscription belonging to the reign of Sultān Nāṣir al-Dīn Nuṣrat Shāh (926-939/1520-1532) records the construction by one Sher Khān of a mosque at the place described as "the town of Shaikh Jalāl Muḥammad Tabrīzī" (في البلاد [بلاد] (شيخ جلال محمد تبريزي)⁶ and a fourth inscription of the reign of Sulaimān Karrānī records the construction in 978/1571 of a mosque in the same place described as the "blessed town of Tabrīzābād,

¹ *Memoirs*, pp. 97-106.

² *Supra*, pp. 151-152.

³ Letter of Sayyid Ashraf Jahāngīr Simnānī to Sultān Ibrāhīm Sharqī, quoted by H. Askari in *B.P.P.*, Vol. LXVIII, Sl. No. 138, 1948, pp. 35-36.

⁴ *J.A.S.B.*, 1874, p. 296; *Memoirs*, p. 169.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Memoris*, p. 171.

known as Deotala.”¹ Obviously Deotala was an important Muslim settlement which continued to command the respect and attention of successive Sultāns of Bengal.

Another early hero of Muslim settlement was Shāh Ṣafī al-Dīn who, according to the legend that has developed over his memory, came with Zafar Khān Ghāzī and others and after having defeated a Hindu chief of the locality established a Muslim settlement at Pandua-Tribeni region of the Hugli district. Shāh Ṣafī al-Dīn, we are told, “continued his wars with the infidels and was at last killed in a fight. His children buried him at Pandua, and erected the vault, which, together with his mosque, still exists. His descendants increased so rapidly, that Pandua soon became a large place. The fame also of the nobility of its inhabitants.... spread over the whole of Bengal.”² H. Blochmann, who visited the place in 1870 and recorded the above-mentioned tradition, mentions that Shāh Ṣafī’s tomb at Pandua, flanked by two old mosques and a tower, “which resembles in structure the Qutb Minār near Delhi,” were under the care of “two Mutawallis who live in a village near Pandua. About three or four generations ago, the lineal descendants of Ṣafī [Ṣafī] having died out, the Mutawalliship fell into the hands of a branch line, to which the present Mutawallis belong. The old mosque is chiefly used for prayer at the time of the Baqr ‘Īd.”³ Blochmann further noted: “The inhabitants of Pandua are chiefly Muhammadans. In former times Hindus had been kept out, though of late lower castes, as shop-keepers, have settled there; but even now-a-days, I am told, not a single Brahmin is to be found there. The inhabitants all claim to have descended from the saint [*shaikh*]...and the nobility (*sharāfat*) of their origin is never questioned outside of Pandua.”³ The date of this settlement is discernible from the reference to Shah Ṣafī al-Dīn’s association with Zafar Khān Ghāzī. The latter is generally identified with Zafar Khān who, under Sultān Kāikā’ūs (690-698 H./1291-1299 A.C.) and Sultān Shams al-Dīn Fīrūz Shah (at least from 701-722 H./1301-1322 A.C.) was instrumental in

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 170.

² *P.A.S.B.*, April. 1870, pp. 124-125.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 121.

extending the Muslim sway in the Hugli region and whose tomb and mosque still exist at Tribeni.¹ Obviously Shāh Ṣafī accompanied Zāfar Khān or immediately followed him there; and though the tradition mentions emperor Fīrūz Shāh of Delhi, it is clearly a popular confusion, and the ruler referred to should be taken, as Blochmann correctly points out,² to be the Bengal Sultān Shams al-Dīn Fīrūz Shāh during whose time the area was in fact brought under the Muslim sway. Speaking about Zāfar Khān's last resting place (*astāna*) Blochmann wrote in 1870: it "consists of two enclosures. The first, which lies at the road along the bank of the Hugli, is built of large basalt stones... Its east wall... faces the river;... and fixed into it, at a height of about six feet from the ground, is a piece of iron, said to be the handle of Zāfar Khān's battle axe. The second enclosure, which is joined to the west wall of the first, is built of sandstone. The Khādim of the Astanah, a man not altogether illiterate, told me that the western tomb was that of Zāfar Khān. The other three, he said, are those of 'Ain Khān Ghāzī, and Ghain Khān Ghāzī (عين خان غازي and غين خان غازي), sons of Zāfar Khān, and the wife of Barkhān Ghāzī. The first enclosure contains the tomb of Barkhān Ghāzī, third son of Zāfar Khān, and of Rahīm Khān Ghāzī and Karīm Khān Ghāzī, sons of Barkhān."³ Clearly Pandua-Tribeni region was the site of an extensive Muslim settlement under Shāh Ṣafī al-Dīn and Zāfar Khān.

Almost simultaneously with the work of the above-mentioned persons, another important Muslim settlement was established at Sylhet in the east under the leadership of "Shaikh

¹ Zāfar Khān's tomb inscription dated 1 Muharram, 713 H./ 28 April, 1313 A.C., *J.A.S.B.*, 1873, pp. 287-288; *E.I.M.*, 1917-1918, pp. 33-34; and Zāfar Khān's mosque inscription, dated 698 H./1298 A.C., *ibid.*, pages respectively 285-286 and 13-15.

² Dr. A. Karim is not quite correct in stating (*Social History*, etc. p. 57) that Blochmann identified Fīrūz Shāh of the legend with Jalāl al-Dīn Fīrūz Shāh Khaljī of Delhi. In his first notice of the legend Blochmann did indeed suggest that of the several Fīrūz Shāhs of Delhi, the Khaljī emperor was the one who would fit in with the time of Shāh Ṣafī al-Dīn (*P.A.S.B.*, April, 1870, p. 125); but subsequently, while noticing the inscriptions, Blochmann revised his opinion and said that Fīrūz Shāh of the legend was to be connected "with Shamsuddin Fīrūz Shāh (I), King of Bengal, whose name will be found below in the inscription of Zāfar Khān's madrasah" (*J.A.S.B.*, 1870, No. 4, p. 282). This revised opinion of Blochmann's was also pointed out by G. Yazdani in his reading of the inscriptions (*E.I.M.*, 1917-18, p. 13). However, Dr. Karim adduces some more reasons in support of what is really Blochmann's identification.

³ *P.A.S.B.*, April, 1870, p. 125.

al-Mashāikh Makhdūm Shaikh Jalāl Mujarrad bin Muḥammad." He is to be distinguished from Shaikh Jalāl Muḥammad Tabrīzī of Pandua-Deotala celebrity noted above. The Sylhet Shaikh is described in an inscription dated 911/1505 (belonging to 'Alā' al-Dīn Ḥusain Shāh's reign) as a Kunyayī,¹ i.e., from Konya, a region in Turkey. This is corroborated by the *Gulzār-i-Abrār*, an early seventeenth century account;² while a mid-nineteenth century biography by Maulawī Nāṣir al-Dīn Hyder entitled *Suḥayl-i-Yaman* describes the Shaikh as having come from Yaman.³ In any case all the accounts agree that the Sylhet Shaikh is different from Shaikh Jalāl Tabrīzī.⁴ According to the two last mentioned works, Shaikh Jalāl bin Muḥammad went to Sylhet with more than three hundred of his companions and after having defeated a local chief named Gaur Govind settled themselves in the area. As noted earlier,⁵ the Sylhet region was also brought under Muslim authority during Sulṭān Shams al-Dīn Fīrūz Shāh's reign in 703/1303. In all likelihood, therefore, Shaikh Jalāl and his companions went there along with or in the wake of that expedition. At any rate they were well settled there by the forties of the century when the celebrated traveller Ibn Baṭūṭa visited the place. He met the Shaikh and found him well advanced in age and at the height of his fame and influence.⁶ Although the traveller, writing his account from memory after 25 years of his visit, confuses the name of the Shaikh and records him as "Jalāl Tabrīzī," he (Ibn Baṭūṭa) makes the significant observation that the people whom he saw around the Shaikh in Sylhet looked "like

¹ *J.A.S.B.*, 1873, pp.293-294. Dr. S.H. al-Ma'sūmī questions the reading of the word as Kunyāyī and suggests, without much reason, that it should be read as either البمانى or صنعاني (*J.A.S.P.*, Vol.X., No.II, 1965, p.66).

² Asiatic Society of Bengal MSS.No. 259, fol.99A, quoted by S.M. Ikram in *J.A.S.P.*, Vol.II, 1957, pp.64-68.

³ *Suḥayl-i-Yaman*, 1275/1858, quoted by S.H. al-Ma'sūmī, *op.cit.*, p.69. Dr. al-Ma'sūmī points out that the *Suḥayl-i-Yaman* is based on two eighteenth century manuscripts, *Rawḍat al-Salātīn*, written in 1128/1715, and *Risālah* of Mu'īn al-Dīn, written in 1134/1721, at the instance of Nawwāb Ja'far 'Alī Khān Nāsirī of Murshidabad.

⁴ According to the *Suḥayl-i-Yaman*, the epithet *Mujarrad* has been associated with the name of the Shaikh in order to distinguish him from three other persons, Shah Jalāl Bukhārī, Shāh Jalāl Tabrīzī and Shāh Jalāl Ganjī Rāwan, and also because "he never married, nor did he ever see a woman". (*Ibid.*, p.69).

⁵ *Supra*, pp.110-111.

⁶ *Supra*, pp.128-129.

the Turks possessing strength..."¹ This tends to support the epigraphic information that the Shaikh hailed from Konya in Turkey. Subsequently, during 'Alā' al-Dīn Ḥusain Shāh's reign, two of his distinguished officers, Khālīṣ Khān and Rukn Khān, who were also admirers of the Shaikh, erected two buildings on the spot respectively in 911/1505 and 918/1512 (most probably the present mausoleum and its annexes).²

Closely following Shaikh Jalāl of Sylhet in point of time was Shaikh 'Aṭā' who lies buried at Gangarampur in Dinajpur district. His tomb and the ruins of an old mosque stand in the centre of the north side of a "very noble tank", as Buchanan noted early in the 19th century, "which is named Dahal Dīghī, and has evidently been formed by the Muhammadans: its water being 4000 feet from east to west, and 1000 from north to south... On many different parts, especially towards the north-east corner, are heaps of bricks, probably the ruins of the houses that were occupied by the Muhammadan officers."³ Shaikh 'Aṭā' was a man of vast learning and unexampled piety; and was evidently the central figure in the Muslim settlement there. The mausoleum over his last resting place was erected at the orders of Sulṭān Sikandar Shāh, son of Sulṭān Ilyās Shāh, in 765/1363. This shows that the Maulānā flourished and died before that date. The inscription recording the erection of the mausoleum describes him as "the pole of Auliā', the unequalled among enquirers, the lamp of truth, the law and the faith."⁴ Subsequently Sulṭān Jalāl al-Dīn Faṭḥ Shāh reconstructed a stone building there in 887/1482, making respectful mention of the Maulānā as "the well-known Makhdūm Maulānā 'Aṭā' Waḥīd al-Dīn."⁵ Still later on Sulṭān Shams al-Dīn Muẓaffar Shāh built a mosque at the place in 896/1491 and referred to the deceased *walī* as the well-known *Makhdūm*, the

¹ *Supra*, p. 129.

² The Sylhet Inscription of Ḥusain Shah, 911/1505, *J.A.S.B.*, 1873, pp. 293-294; and the Dacca Museum Inscription of Ḥusain Shāh, (also found at Sylhet), 918/1512, *J.A.S.B.*, 1922, p. 413. It is this latter inscription which specifically mentions the date of the conquest of Sylhet in 703/1303 during Sulṭān Shams al-Dīn Fīrūz Shāh's time.

³ Buchanan, *Historical Description of Dinajpur*, p. 51, quoted in *J.A.S.B.*, 1872, p. 102.

⁴ *J.A.S.B.*, 1872, pp. 104-105; *E.I.M.*, 1929-1930, pp. 10-11.

⁵ Gangarampur Inscription of Faṭḥ Shāh, *Varendra Research Society Monograph*, No. 6, Rajshahi, 1935, pp. 3-4.

pole of the holy men, Maulānā 'Aṭā', may Allah make his grave fragrant and make Paradise his resting place."¹ Finally, during 'Alā' al-Dīn Ḥusain Shāh's reign, one of his officers built a mosque and minaret in front of the gate of Shaikh 'Aṭā's mausoleum in 918/1512. In this inscription he is mentioned as "Shaikh al-Mashāikh Shaikh 'Aṭā'."² Undoubtedly Gangarampur as a centre of Muslim settlement and cultural activities owed much to the man who lies buried there and who for a long time continued to attract the attention of successive rulers even after his death.

Another hero of Muslim settlement and colonization was Makhdūm Shāh Daulah Shahīd. He, along with 21 of his companions, lie buried at Shāhzādpur in the Pabna district. According to the legend that has developed over his memory, Makhdūm Shāh Daulah Shahīd came from Yaman with a large number of relatives and followers and settled at Shāhzādpur. The suffix *Shahīd* to his name indicates that he was the leader of a group of fighters who carved out a place for themselves in course of a military adventure. Although the legend ascribes to him a very early period, he appears to have come there in the late 7th or early 8th century Hijri (end of the 13th or early 14th century A.C.). The group of tombs and the adjacent old mosque are endowed with 722 *bighās* (about 350 acres) of rent-free (*lā-kharāj*) lands held by *mutawallīs* from generation to generation.

Another early settlement of Muslims was at Rampal in the Munshiganj subdivision of Dacca district. There exists the tomb of a settler-preacher named Bābā Adam Shahīd, flanked by the ruins of an old mosque. According to the legend that is still current in the locality, he came from Makka with a large number of followers and after having fought with one Ballāl Sen established the Muslims there.² It has been suggested that Ballāl Sen of this legend was not the Sena ruler of that name who ruled in Bengal much before the Muslim conquest, but a local chief of that name who lived in the later half of the 8th century Hijrī (14th

¹ *J.A.S.B.*, 1904, Part I, No. 3, pp. 262-271; *Bengal District Gazetteers: Pabna*, 1923, pp. 121-126.

² *J.A.S.B.*, 1873, p. 285; and 1889, p. 23.

century A.C.).¹ This seems very probable because it was about that time that the Muslim dominion in Bengal was extended over the Dacca region.² The old mosque near Bābā Adam Shahīd's tomb is called by the local people as Bābā Adam Shahīd's Mosque; but according to the inscription found in it, it was constructed in Rajab, 888/August 1483, during the reign of Jalāl al-Dīn Fath Shāh by one of his Abyssinian officers named Malīk Kāfūr.³ There are also the ruins of two other old mosques in two nearby villages.⁴ Obviously the locality was a lively Muslim settlement by the end of the 9th century Hijrī.

Similarly at Mulla Simla, Phurphura, in the Hugli district, there is an old mosque and the tomb of an early Muslim hero whose original name was Muḥammad Kabīr but who is popularly known as Shāh Anwar Qulī Ḥalwī. The latter designation, according to Blochmann who first noticed the tradition and the inscription found there, probably indicated that Shāh Anwar Qulī came from Aleppo.⁵ The tradition current in the locality says that Shāh Anwar Qulī and his companion Karam al-Dīn successfully fought with a Baghdi tribal chief and established themselves there. The historical importance of the place is indicated by the inscription found at the entrance of Anwar Qulī's mausoleum. The inscription records, however, the construction not of the mausoleum but of a mosque by one Ulugh Majlis Khān in 777/1375 in the reign of Sulṭān Sikandar Shāh.⁶ The inscription "must have belonged in former times to the mosque. The old mosque itself has at present no inscription."⁷

There are references to other Muslim settlements in different parts of the country though details about them are not available. Thus at Mahasthan in Bogra district, where Sulṭān Māhīṣawār lies buried, there was another flourishing Muslim settlement. According to tradition he was a prince of Balkh who, having renounced

¹ N.N. Basu in *J.A.S.B.*, 1896, pp. 36-37.

² *Supra*, pp. 116-117.

³ *J.A.S.B.*, 1873, p. 284; and 1889, p. 23, Pl. V.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 1889, p. 23.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 1870, pp. 291-292.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 292.

⁷ *Ibid.*

the privileges of royalty, came to Bengal and settled there for propagating Islam. Whatever may be the identity of the *shaikh* who lies buried there, the tradition is undoubtedly reminiscent of the fact of immigration of a number of princely personages in Bengal due to political turmoils in Central Asia and the adjoining lands. The historicity of the Mahasthan *shaikh* is at least attested by a *sanad* (charter) subsequently granted by emperor Aurangzeb in 1096/1685 which, referring to earlier *sanads*, confirmed the right of Sayyid Muhammad Tāhir, Sayyid ‘Abd al-Raḥmān, and Sayyid Muḥammad Riḍā, described as the descendants of the original settler(s), to the rent-free (*lā-kharāj*) lands attached to the tomb of Shāh Sulṭān Māhīsawār.¹ Similarly at Kalna, Burdwan district, there exist two old tombs, one of Majlis Ṣāhib and the other of Badar Ṣāhib, who are said to have come and settled there for preaching Islam.² At Hetampur in Dinajpur district there is the abode of Badar al-Dīn who is said to have obtained military assistance from Sulṭān ‘Alā’ al-Dīn Ḥusain Shāh in order to defeat one Hindu chief named Mahesha and to establish a Muslim colony there.³ At Dacca, within the precincts of the old government house at Motijhil, a one-domed mausoleum marks the last resting place of Shāh Jalāl Dakinī who is said to have come with a number of followers and settled there towards the end of the 9th century Hijrī (15th century A.C.).⁴ At Mīrpur, a few miles away from the old Dacca city (now included in the greater Dacca city) there lies buried Shāh ‘Alī Baghdādī who also settled there about the same period.⁵ At Bagha in the Rajshahi district there is the mausoleum of another settler-preacher named Shāh Mu‘azzam Dānishmand, popularly known as Shāh Daulah, who is said to have come from Baghdad to Bengal during the reign of Sulṭān Nāṣir al-Dīn Nuṣrat Shāh. Shāh Daulah married the daughter of an influential noble named ‘Alā Bakhsh Barkhurdār Lashkarī and settled at Makhdūmpur near Bagha. Subsequently Shāh Daulah moved to Bagha.⁶ In fact Sulṭān Nuṣrat Shāh himself had a *jāmi‘*

¹ *Sanad* discovered and published by H. Beveridge in *J.A.S.B.*, 1878, Part I, No. 1, pp. 92-93.

² M. Enamul Haq, *Bang-e Sūfī Probhāva* (Bengali Text), Calcutta, 1935, pp. 132-33.

³ *Bengal District Gazetteers: Dinajpur*, 1912, p. 20.

⁴ Hakīm Ḥabīb al-Raḥmān, *Asudgan-i-Dhākā*, Dacca, 1946, p. 32.

⁵ Enamul Haq, *op.cit.*, p. 143; Dani, *Dacca*, 1956, p. 195. ⁶ *J.A.S.B.*, 1904, pp. 108-113.

mosque constructed there in 930/1523-24, the ruins of which lie beside Shāh Daulah's tomb.¹ The Bagha Muslim settlement and the educational and social activities of Shāh Mu'azzam Dānishmand's descendants continued to receive recognition from subsequent rulers. Thus another Gaud ruler made a grant of 22 villages to the latter's son Hāmid Dānishmand. When Prince Khurram (later on emperor Shāh Jahān) came to Bengal, he also made a grant of forty-two villages with an annual rent of eight thousand ruppees to Hāmid Dānishmand's son 'Abd al-Wahhāb.² As late as 1609 the Muslim traveller 'Abd al-laṭīf saw Bagha as an important Muslim settlement where one "Hawdha Mian," most probably Hāmid Dānishmand or his son 'Abd al-Wahhāb, was maintaining a *madrasa*.³

Thus in course of several centuries of Muslim rule the different parts of Bengal were dotted with Muslim settlements and colonies. Significantly enough, almost all the persons whose tombs and abodes have come to light appear from traditions and other sources as *ghāzīs* (victorious generals) or *shahīds* (martyrs) and are invariably said to have arrived with large numbers of followers. Some of them, like Khān Jahān, brought new forest regions under cultivation and settlement.

IV. INSTANCES OF CONVERSION

Propagation of Islam was doubtless an important aspect of the activities of the settler-preachers. In fact it was in recognition of their intellectual status and their services to the society as teachers and preachers that many of them were patronized and granted rent-free lands by the rulers. A number of the *shaikhs* maintained academies and *madrāsas* where they imparted instructions in different branches of Islamic learning.⁴ There is however very little direct evidence of any organized Islamic missionary efforts. Nevertheless, individual efforts of the *shaikhs*, and their teachings and examples must have contributed to the expansion of Islam among the local population. This was however only gradual

¹ Bagha Inscription of Nuṣrat Shāh, 930/1523-24, *ibid.*, p.111.

² *Ibid.*, pp.111-112.

³ 'Abd al-Latīf's Travel Account, *B.P.P.*, XXXV, Part II., pp.143-146.

⁴ See *infra*, pp.832-840.

and slow, as occasional references in the contemporary sources to instances of conversion to Islam indicate. It is noteworthy that there is no mention in the sources, literary or otherwise, of any large-scale conversion at any time or place. Had there been any case of mass conversion of any class of people, high or low, it would have definitely found special mention in the contemporary chronicles or hagiological literature, particularly as the writers of the time were careful to note any point of religious merit for their heroes.

It may be assumed that Islam with its teachings of one Creator for all the universe and of equality of all men before Him must have appeared as a revolutionary force to a people who were acknowledgedly degraded and divided by iniquitous social divisions and disabilities. Yet the earliest reference to conversion is not that of any section of the population over whom the Muslims had established their immediate political authority, but of a chief of the Mech tribe in north Bengal. It is stated that after having fallen into Muḥammad bin Bakhtiyār Khaljī's hand in course of his Tibet expedition, the Mech chief professed Islam, assumed the name of 'Alī, and then acted for sometime as a guide for the Muslim forces.¹ The account does not in any way suggest that other members of his tribe followed his example. On the contrary it appears that his acceptance of Islam was rather an act of convenience and that after his return to his tribe he either relapsed into his old faith or failed to win his people for Islam; for even till now the tribal people in that part of the land stick to their old faith.

The next recorded instance of conversion to Islam is that of the *yogic* (mystic) Bhojar Brahman of Kāmṛūp, Assam, who came to Lakhnawatī during the time of 'Alī Mardān Khaljī (1210-1213 A.C.), had an open discussion there with Qādī Rukn al-Dīn al-Samarqandī about the merits of Islam, and being convinced of its truth embraced it.² The conversion of Bhojar Brahman is significant. It shows that within a short time after the

¹ *Tabaqāt*, (tr. Raverty), Vol.I., pp.560-561. See also *supra*, p.66.

² *Journal of the Pakistan Historical Society*, Vol.I., Part I., pp.446-55. Qādī Rukn al-Dīn Samarqandī is identified with Qādī Rukn al-Dīn Ḥamid Muḥammad bin Muḥammad al-Amidi of Samarqand. He died at Bukhara in 615/1218.

arrival of the Muslims in Bengal Islam had aroused the curiosity and interest of the leaders of Hinduism even at far off places like Kāmrūp which was not till then in any way under the jurisdiction of the Muslims. It also shows that even at that early period of Muslim rule in Bengal a Brahman from Kāmrūp, the ancient seat of Hindu learning in the east, was free to hold in the Muslim capital itself an open discussion on the merits of Islam. Nothing could be a stronger proof of the liberalism of the early Muslim rulers in Bengal and the extent of religious freedom that they allowed to the conquered people. It further shows that from the very beginning Islam made contact with the Hindus on an intellectual plane and gained converts from their highest class through persuasion. Bhojar Brahman presented a Hindu *yogic* work named *Amritkunda* (cistern of nectar) to Qādī Rukn al-Dīn who perused it and had it translated into Persian and Arabic.¹

The conversion of Bhojar Brahman must have had some impact on his former colleagues and associates in Kāmrūp. There is a reference to the conversion about that time of at least another Kāmrūp Brahman, Ambhavanāth by name. And the intellectual curiosity aroused by Islam among the learned class of the Hindus continued, for we hear that Hindu *pandits* (scholars belonging to the Brahman caste) had religious disputations with Shaikh Jalāl al-Dīn Tabrīzī, one of the earliest settler-preachers who came to Bengal shortly after 'Alī Mardān's time,² and that in consequence they all embraced Islam.³

In fact all the specifically known instances of conversion are from among Brahmans and other men of position in the Hindu society. The most remarkable instance in this series is the conversion of Kāns's son Jadu and his accession to the Muslim Bengal throne about the year 818/1415 under the name of Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad.⁴ Jadu's conversion marks a significant stage in the expansion of both Islam and the Muslim power in Bengal; and it must have caused deep stirrings not only in Kāns's family

¹ *Ibid.* The Arabic version of the book is reproduced in *Journal Asiatique*, Tome CCXXIII, pp. 292-344.

² See *supra*, p. 773.

³ *Sekh Subhādaya*, ed. Sukumar Sen, Calcutta, 1927, quoted in Karim, *op.cit.*, p. 65.

⁴ *Supra*, pp. 153, 160.

circles but also in the Hindu society in general. Unfortunately we do not have any details about this event except that perhaps one of his brothers held out against him for some time. Another king, belonging to the Koch tribe, is said to have embraced Islam at the instance of Shāh Sultān Rūmī who settled at Madanpur in Mymensingh district early in the Muslim period.¹ Similarly, the minister of a local chief of Sondip island (south of the Noakhali district but now under the jurisdiction of Chittagong district) embraced Islam at the hand of Shāh Sultān Māhīawār who ultimately settled at Mahasthan in Bogra district.² An influential Brahman embraced Islam at the instance of Khān Jahān 'Alī of Bagerhat (Khulna district), and later on became known as Pīr 'Alī.³ At the latter's instance two other Brahmans of Jessore embraced Islam and under their new names of Kamāl al-Dīn Chowdhuri and Jamal al-Dīn Chowdhuri became subsequently famous as zamindars of Singhatia in the same district.⁴ Hindu Bengali literature of the 16th century A.C. (10th century H.) also makes reference to Brahmans becoming Muslims. Thus the *Chaitanya Bhāgavat* (Ādi, 14th) states: "among the Hindus there are some who, though they are Brahmans, become *yavana* (Muslims) according to their own will."⁵ Kālāpāhār, the famous general of the Afghan rulers Sulaimān Karrānī and Dā'ūd Khān Karrānī, is generally believed to be a convert from the Kāyastha caste.⁶ During the viceroyalty of Islam Khān (Jahāngīr's reign) a wealthy Hindu zamindar of Shāhzādpur in Pabna district, named Raghu Rāi, son of Rājā Rai, embraced Islām.⁷ Even as late as the mid-eighteenth century A.C. two Hindu zamindars of Tirhut embraced Islam and accompanied 'Alīvardī Khān in his march against Sarfarāz Khān.⁸

¹ M. Enamul Haq, *op.cit.*, p.138.

² *Ibid.*, pp.140-141.

³ J.A.S.B., 1867, p.132.

⁴ N. Basu, *Bāger Sāmājik Itihāsa* (Bengali text), Vol.III, pp.154-56, quoted in Rahim, *op.cit.*, p.66.

⁵ *Chaitanya Bhāgavata*, Ādi 14th, quoted in Karim, *op.cit.*, p.144, n.1; also Rahim, *op.cit.*, p.67.

⁶ A.N., III, pp.181-82. This information of Abū al-Faḍl's is not, however, free from doubt.

⁷ B.G., I, p.32.

⁸ *Siyar*, I, p.358. The other generally believed instance, that of Murshid Qulī Khān's being a convert from Hinduism, is not also free from doubt. See *supra*, pp.533-534.

As persons from the highest class of the Hindu society embraced Islam, it may be assumed that others from the generality of that community must have also entered the new faith. As already pointed out, we have no specific information on this point in the sources. All that is available is some general allusions to the spread of Islam among the population without any further indication about its actual extent. Thus Ibn Batūta states that the people of Sylhet accepted Islam at the instance of Shaikh (Shāh) Jalāl.¹ It is well worth remembering in this connection, however, that a large number of foreign Muslims had accompanied the Shaikh there and that the celebrated traveller made the significant observation that the people whom he saw there were like the Turks possessing strength. It may also be noted that many Afghans and their followers subsequently settled in the region during the Mughal period, so that the Muslim population in that district should by no means be taken to be the descendants of converts from local population alone. A second but very indirect allusion to the spread of Islam among the local population is in the Kāikā'ūs inscription found at Zafar Khan's mosque at Tribeni in the Hugli district, dated 698/1298, in which one Qādī Nāṣir Muḥammad is stated to have spent his private money "to manifest the *Dīn* (religion) of Allah (i.e. Islam) among the haughty."² We also come across the names of a number of Bengali Muslim poets who wrote in the 14th, 15th and 16th centuries in Bengali on different aspects of Islam for those who did not understand Arabic or Persian.³ Evidently the readers whom these poets had in view were Muslims of local origin. There is also unmistakable evidence showing that Islam made some appreciable progress among the local population at least during the reign of 'Alā' al-Dīn Husain Shāh. In one of his inscriptions he himself expresses his satisfaction that Islam was spreading in the land under his rule.⁴ This is to some extent confirmed also by the Portuguese merchant Duarte Barbosa who visited Bengal in 1518 A.C. and who wrote

¹ *Supra*, p. 128.

² *E.I.M.*, 1917-1918, pp. 14-15.

³ M. Enamul Haq, *Muslim Vāṅlā Shāhitya* (Bengali text), Dacca, 1955, pp. 59-61, 68, 90, 92-95, 113.

⁴ Jahanabad Inscription, Dani, *Bibliography*, pp. 65-66.

that the king, who was a "Moor" (Muslim) had an extensive country under his rule "inhabited by Gentiles [Hindus], of whom every day many turn Moors [Muslims], to obtain the favour of the king and the governors,"¹ It is also well known that many Buddhists, because of their rivalry with the Brahmans and their discriminatory practices, welcomed the Muslims and embraced Islam.²

Thus the Muslim population of Bengal are composed in a large measure of immigrants from other lands and partly of local converts. The latter were in no way limited to the lowest classes of the Hindus, but were drawn mostly from their highest orders as well as from Buddhists and others. There is also no positive evidence of any mass conversion to Islam, so to say. On the contrary, all the available information goes to show that the rate of conversion was rather slow. If the census figures of the late nineteenth century are any reliable index, it would appear that on the eve of the British take-over in the mid-eighteenth century Muslims constituted roughly about a half of the total population of Bengal, though in its eastern districts their number was somewhat higher than that of the Hindus. Therefore even if for argument's sake it is assumed that the entire Muslim population of Bengal are local converts, not more than fifty per cent of the total local population could have embraced Islam during the long period of more than five hundred years of Muslim rule. That means the conversion on an average of only 10 per cent of the population in one hundred years. Considering, however, the acknowledged fact of a higher birth-rate among the Muslims than among the Hindus it would appear that not more than one third of the total population could have been converted during the five and a half centuries, that is some 5 to 6 per cent in a century. But the hypothesis of the Bengal Muslim population being entirely made up of converts is evidently untenable so that the actual rate of conversion from the local population was much lower, perhaps not more than 15 per cent in all over the centuries.

¹ *Purchas His Pilgrimes*, Hakluyt Soc., Vol. II., p. 148.

² This is clearly reflected in the *Sunya Purāna*, ed. C. C. Bandopādhyāya, Calcutta, 1336 B. E., chapter entitled "Niranjāner Rushma".

Such slow progress of Islam among the local population does not appear to be unusual in view of the following facts. In the first place, when the Muslims established themselves in Bengal much of the Islamic missionary zeal and enthusiasm was lost upon the Muslim rulers and leaders, they themselves being in a large measure the by-products of an age of decline culminating in the break-up of the 'Abbāsid *khilāfat*. Many of them did indeed patronize Islam in the sense of maintaining the *shaikhs* and the 'ulamā' and establishing mosques and *madrasas*; but this was done more or less by way of carrying with them the existing immigrant Muslim population. There never was a systematic policy of conversion adopted by the rulers; nor did any ruler force Islam upon any one of his subjects. Islam was thus left to itself so far as the policy of the rulers was concerned. Hence the conversions that took place from time to time were at the instance of the *shaikhs* and the 'ulamā' who settled in different parts of the country. Secondly, almost from the beginning the Muslim leaders were divided amongst themselves and were engaged in mutual struggles for power. This could not but compromise their position in the eyes of the local people. Moreover this position very soon obliged the rival leaders to seek the cooperation of the local people. Thus, for instance, Shams al-Dīn Ilyās Shāh, founder of the Ilyās Shāhī dynasty, found it necessary to recruit a large number of Hindu foot soldier (*pāiks*) in his fight against the Delhi ruler. One result of this "liberalism" of necessity was that there was no incentive for the local population to change their religion. Thirdly, the leaders of Hinduism also took steps to check the progress of Islam by launching such reform movements as *Vaishnavism* and by encouraging various local cults. The process was indirectly facilitated by the heterodoxical and mystical ideas which the Muslims themselves brought with them, chiefly from Iran.

The ratio of immigrant Muslims to local converts is difficult to determine. The available evidence indicates however that the number of the former was considerably higher than that of the latter. An idea of how immigrations have changed the demographic features of Bengal may be obtained from the fact that on

the eve of the British withdrawal in 1947 Muslims in the eastern districts of Bengal which now constitute Bangladesh numbered about sixty per cent of the population;¹ but according to the latest census they now constitute more than 85 per cent of the population.² This variation in their percentage has been due not to an increase in their birth-rate, nor even to conversion to Islam during the last quarter of a century, but to the migration of some Hindus from the former East Pakistan and the immigration into it of a considerable number of Muslims from west Bengal and other parts of India as a sequel to the civil disturbances that preceeded and followed the British withdrawal. An almost similar immigration of Muslims from west to east Bengal took place during the Maratha incursions in the mid-eighteenth century. Considering these two recent instances with those noted earlier in this chapter, one might agree with A.A. Ghuznavi who, while submitting a note in 1901 to the government about the origin of Bengal Muslims, stated: "perhaps the majority of the Mohamedans of the present day have an admixture of foreign blood in their veins though that might have undergone a great many dilutions.... I think it will not be unsafe to conclude that roughly speaking 20% of the present Mohamedans are lineal descendants of foreign settlers, that 50% of them have an admixture of foreign blood and the remaining 30% are probably descended from Hindu and other converts."³

¹ *Census of India, 1941, Vol. IV (Bengal, Tables)*, 6, 44-45, 48-49.

² *Census of Bangladesh, 1974, National Volume, Report and Tables*, Government of Bangladesh, Dacca, 1977, 23.

³ MSS. Eur.E295/17, Risley Collection, 18.

CHAPTER XXX SOCIO-RELIGIOUS LIFE

I: INTEGRATION OF IMMIGRANT MUSLIMS WITH LOCAL CONVERTS

The Muslim society of Bengal was composed, as mentioned in the previous chapter, of a large number of immigrants from other lands as well as local converts to Islam. The earliest settlers were Khaljī and Ilbarī Turks, who were followed from time to time by others from Central Asia, Iran, Arabia, Abyssinia, and other parts of the Islamic world. Later on the Afghans, and in their wake the Mughals and another band of Iranians came and settled in the land. All these people came either as conquerors and adventurers or, as the Muslim rule was stabilized, as preachers, teachers, traders and artisans, and in search of fortune and profession generally. With the exception of some Abyssinians, a few Mughal officials and some Afghan mercenary soldiers of 'Alīvardī Khān all the others adopted the land as their own and settled in it. It must have taken quite some time for these people of divers origins to adjust themselves with the new country and its climate; but the process seems to have been facilitated by the stark fact of necessity which was that almost all those people had been uprooted from their original lands and had practically nowhere else to go and find a more favourable home therein. Also the equalizing and unifying force of Islam made it possible for Muslims of various races, colours and countries to live in perfect social harmony in the land of their adoption except for the struggle for political power which ensued from time to time as one or the other group of the immigrants grew in strength and number. Such struggles for power were natural enough; and they account for the changes that took place in the lines of rulers as seen in the emergence on the stage first of the Ilyās Shāhīs, then the Abyssinians and then the Husainīs (Arabs). Yet under none of these groups were the government and administration run on narrow and exclusive racial lines. Two other factors appear to have favoured the process of social adjustment among the different groups of immigrants. In the first place there was an abundance of land and other natural resources in relation to the number of population which was very thin at that time, so that all

the different groups could easily settle themselves in the country. Secondly, no national spirit in the modern sense of the term was known at that time so that we do not hear of any opposition on the part of the common local population to the coming of the Muslims on the score of their being "foreigners." Nor do we hear of any group of the latter, when already established in authority, having put any restrictions on the incoming of the others. In this sense there was indeed considerable demographic and social mobility which is rather unthinkable in a modern nationalistic society.

Equally remarkable is the integration of the immigrant Muslims with the local converts. As indicated earlier, conversion to Islam took place from among both the higher and lower strata of the Hindu society as well as from the Buddhists. But whatever their previous social position, their conversion to Islam placed them on an equal footing with the other Muslims. There is no indication in the sources that the local converts were regarded in any way socially inferior to the immigrant Muslims, nor is there any instance of ill-feeling between the two. On the other hand the conscience of the society does not appear to have been disturbed in any way by the accession of a new convert, Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad, to the Sulṭanat. It is also noteworthy that the sources do not make any specific mention of local converts being appointed in state services. This is surely due to the absence of any distinction being made on the score of birth-place. As we find at least one new convert being placed on the throne and many Hindus of different castes being employed in various grades of the state services including the army, definitely no discrimination could have attached to local converts as a class in respect of official situations.

Indeed such distinction based on race, colour or country is opposed to the very spirit of Islam. This does not mean, however, that there could not be different categories of people in the society in respect of merit, intellectual accomplishments and official and non-official situations. Indeed the earliest reference to the existence of such categories of people in the Bengal Muslim society is found in a proclamation issued in 1353 by the Delhi Sulṭān Fīrūz

Shāh Tughlaq in the course of his campaign against Bengal. He called upon, in the order mentioned, (a) the *Sayyids* (*Sādāt*), the '*ulamā*' and the *mashāikhs*; (b) the *Khāns*, *Malīks*, '*umarā*', *sadrs*, *akābir* and *Ma'ārif* and their suite; (c) the *zamindars*, *muqādims*, *mafruzman* (*mafruzian*?), *madkan* (*malkan*?) and such like; and (d) the hermits, *sains*(?) and *gabrs* (?) not to support Hājī Ilyās (Ilyās Shāh) who was stated to be a rebel. In lieu of such cooperation on their part these people were assured of the continued enjoyment of their rent-free lands, stipends, wages, salaries, revenue, produce, etc.¹ The proclamation was doubtless drafted in strict accordance with social etiquette and order of precedence. It is therefore significant that the learned class, the '*ulamā*' and *mashāikh*, together with the *Sayyids*, were given precedence over all the other groups, which shows the esteem and distinction in which they were held in the society. The terms '*ulamā*' and *mashāikh* mean respectively the learned men and doctors in the religious sciences; while the term *Ṣayyid* was generally applied to persons descended from the prophet's family and were as such held in high esteem and ranked with the '*ulamā*' and *mashaikh*. We have reference to the settlement of *Ṣayyids* in Bengal as early as the time of Sultān Ghiyāth al-Dīn 'Iwāḍ Khaljī (610-624/1213-1227) who granted them stipends from the state.² Significantly, Fīrūz Shāh Tughlaq's proclamation speak of "stipends" and "rent-free lands" which were undoubtedly the privileges enjoyed by this category of the people. Khān Jahān, the south Bengal governor who lies buried at Bagerhat (d. 26 Dhu al-Hijja, 863/25 Oct. 1459), claims himself to be "a lover of the descendants of the noblest of Prophets" (محب لأولاد سيد المرسلين).³ A *Ṣayyid* (Husainī) dynasty later on ruled in Bengal. *Khāns*, *Malīks*, '*umarā*', *sadrs*, *akābir* and *ma'ārif* clearly refer to the highest official class. The titles *Khān* and *Malīk*, with different qualifying terms indicating grades and ranks such as *Khān al-A'zam*, *Malīk al-Mulūk*, etc., are frequently met with in the inscriptions as titles

¹ *Inshā'-i-Mahru* (Letters of 'Ayn al-Mulk Mahru), MSS, A.S.B., Calcutta, quoted in *J.A.S.B.*, 1923, p.280.

² *Minhāj*, 161.

³ *J.A.S.B.*, 1867, p.135.

of high officials, ministers, generals. etc. The term *umarā'* (plural of *amīr*) means princes or nobles; while *Ṣadrs* were officers in charge of religious affairs and charities. *Akābir* and *ma'ārif* mean the distinguished and experienced ones, and might refer to other high official positions. On the whole, these people constituted the official "aristocracy" and "nobility." It must be pointed out that this aristocracy or nobility were by no means hereditary, but were essentially based on talent and qualifications. As indicated earlier, even "slaves" were at times influential members of the aristocracy. The third category mentioned in proclamation, namely *zamindars*, *muqādims*, etc., were persons connected with the administration and collection of the land revenue. Though an influential group, they were next to the above mentioned people in order of precedence. The fourth category, *sains* and *gabrs*, most probably refer to the *sādhus* and *gurus* of the Hindus.

The existence of different categories of people in the Muslim society is also well attested by the contemporary Bengali literature. The sixteenth century poet Vipradas, for instance, while referring to the Muslim settlement at Sātgaon (Hugli) writes: "There live so many *Yavanas* (Muslims) consisting of Mongols, Pathans and *muqādims* that their number cannot be properly ascertained. There are also the *Sayyids*, the *mullas* and the *qādīs* who are engaged with the Qur'ān and the *kitābs* during both parts of the day."¹ Similarly the 16th century poet Mukundarām writes in connection with another Muslim settlement: "there came the *Ṣayyids*, the *Qādīs* and the Mughals, riding on horses."² The term *Mulla* as used by Vipradās refers to the principal *ālīm* in a village, while the expressions *muqādim* (*Muqaddam?*), *qādī* etc. clearly refer to the official dignitaries, indicating perhaps that these two types of officials were posted at

¹ *Manasamangala*, quoted in S.Sen., *Bangla Sahityer Itihasa*, Calcutta, 1940, p.114. The passage runs as follows:

নিবসে যবন যত তাহা দা বসি [ব] কত-
বোম্বল পাইল বোকাদীম।

সৈয়দ মোগা কাদি কোরাণ কোরাণ রাতি,
দুই ভক্ত করে তহনিম ॥

² Mukundarām, *Chandikāvya*, quoted in J.N. Das Gupta, *Bengal in the Sixteenth century*, Calcutta University, 1914, p.89 n. See *Supra*, p.727; and also the following note.

every important locality. *Sayyids*, Mongols (Mughals) and Pathans are generic terms, the latter two meaning in general Muslims of foreign origin rather than strictly those of the Mongol and Pathan races, for in Mukundarām's time they do not appear to have come in any appreciable number to Bengal.

II: SOCIO-RELIGIOUS LIFE

The immigrant and local Muslims together formed a society distinct from that of the non-Muslims. This is nowhere more strikingly illustrated than in the patterns of habitations of the two communities. Whenever Muslims and Hindus lived in any particular locality they invariably occupied separate parts of the village or town or settlement as the case might be. The same pattern persists even today; and a visitor to the interior of Bengal districts would not fail to observe this. This pattern did not develop in modern times as a result of any recent "nationalist" or "communal" feelings, but is noticeable from the very beginning. A clear picture of this is given by the same sixteenth century poet Mukundarām who thus writes about a Muslim settlement at the city of Bir, an imaginary hero: "Leaving the city of Kalinga the *ra'yats* came with their homesteads and everything to the city of Bir where lived many races. Accepting *pān* from him (in token of their consent to the settlement agreement) the Muslims settled there. They built their houses there and lived together in that western part which they named *Hāsānhāti* ." ¹ Incidentally, this is also an important piece of literary evidence showing the coming of Muslims from outside and their settlement in Bengal. For generations Muslims and Hindus thus lived in two almost mutually exclusive quarters, though situated in the same locality. There was of course exchange of courtesies and at times even cooperation in the field of common interest, but the two societies ran on parallel lines, never meeting and merging with each other. There was no inter-dining or inter-marrying, nor did they share

¹ *Chandikāvya*, quoted in *ibid.*, pp.89-90. The passage runs as follows:

কলিঙ্গ নগর ছাড়ি,	জমা নগর গাড়ি,	খাউস চড়িয়া হাড়ি,	বৈদ্য মোহন হাড়ি,
নানাবিধ বৌদ্ধ নগর।		দুর্গাচাঁদ বৌদ্ধ হাড়ি।	
বৌদ্ধ পাইয়া পান,	হিন্দু কুলদান,	দুর্গাচাঁদ পানি পানি,	কলিঙ্গ হাড়ি হাড়ি,
শুদ্ধ দিক বৌদ্ধ হাড়ি।		কলিঙ্গ হাড়ি হাড়ি।	

common traditions and values. Even the educational activities of the two ran through ages in two separate channels with different curricula and text-books, although the two communities spoke the same language.¹

Within their own society the Muslims regulated their life generally in accordance with the principles of Islam. They said the daily and weekly prayers regularly for which they erected mosques, kept fast during the month of Ramaḍān and established *maktabs* (*madrasas*) for the education of their children. The wealthy and capable sections also performed *hajj* and paid *zakāt*. Within their society the Muslims settled their mutual affairs in the light of the Qur'ān and *ḥadīth* and with the help of their learned and elderly men. The same Bengali poet gives a graphic pen-picture of the daily life of the Muslims of Hāsānhāti thus: "They rise at *fajr* and by spreading red mat say their prayers five times a day. They also count beads in remembrance of their prophets and religious guides. Ten or twenty of the brother Muslims sit together and settle the affairs of the society. For all day long they recite the Qur'ān. Some of them distribute sweets in the market places in the name of their religious guides, beat drums and raise their flags. They are very wise and do not cheat any one; nor do they give up fasting (in the month of Ramaḍān) as long as they have life in them. Their appearance is formidable. They do not keep hair on their heads but grow beards down to their chests. They always adhere to their own ways, wear ten-sided caps on their heads, and *ijārs* (trousers) tied firmly round their waists.... They also set up *maktabs* where *makhdums* (teachers) instruct the Muslim children."² A similar picture is

¹ See the following chapter.

² Quoted in J.N. Das Gupta, *op.cit.* The Bengali text runs as follows:

ফজর সন্ময়ে উঠি,	বিছায়ে লোহিত পাতি,	বড়ই মানিষক,	কাহাকে না করে ছশ,
পাঁচ বেরি করয়ে নমাজ।		প্রাণ গেলে রোজা নাহি ছাড়ি।	
সোলেমানি নান্না ধরে,	জপে পীর শেগঘরে,	ধরয়ে কাহোজ বেশ,	নাপে নাহি রাবে বেশ,
পীরের বোকায়ে বয়ে সাঁজ ॥		বুক আচ্ছাদিতা রাবে লাড়ি ॥	
দশ বিগ বেরাদরে,	বসিয়া বিচার করে,	না ছাড়ে আপন পপে,	দশ রেবা টুপি নাশে,
অনুপিন কিতাব কোরাণ।		ইজার পয়সে দড় করি।	
সাঁজে ডালা দেই হাতে,	পীরের শীকনী বাঁটে,	১৩ দিন ব্রহ্মবাস,	১৩ দিন মফরাস
সাঁজে বাজে দগড় নিশান ॥		মতাম পতাক লগনা।	

given by poet 'Abd al-Karīm Khondkār (17th-18th century). Speaking about a village named Bandar in Roshang (Arakan) he says: "There lived in that village *qāḍīs*, *muftīs*, '*ulamā*', religious *faqīrs* and *darwishes*. Those high-ranking Muslims living there used to converse with the king on equal and friendly terms. Whenever a poor man happened to visit the village, he was never returned empty-handed. For saying prayers a mosque was built there [by Ṣādiq Nānā Atiabar, a leading inhabitant]. For this act he became well-known in the society. There gathered a good number of '*ulamā*' in the village who supervised the regular saying of prayers. One of them was appointed *khaṭīb*, while another was appointed *imām* (respectively for *jum'a* and daily prayers.)"¹

The poets' statements about the Muslims' adherence to the principles and practices of Islam and the integrity of their character are well attested by contemporary Chinese accounts. Wang Ta'-yuan's account (*Tao yi che leo*), compiled between 1349 and 1350, emphatically refers to the "riches and integrity" of the people of Bengal.² Another account which refers to a Chinese diplomatic mission (led by Hou-hien) to the Bengal Sultān's court in 1415 states: "The people of this country are most generous in character. ... Every one of them is engaged in business, the value of which may be ten thousand pieces of gold, but when a bargain has been struck, they never express regret."³ In the same tenor another account reads: "Both the king and his officials follow the Mahomedan [Muslim] style in their turbans and dress. They all are Mahomedans and observe also the Mahomedan marriage and burial customs. The people of Bengal are good tempered, rich and honest."⁴ Yet another account records: "The customs of this country are very generous... They have much culture. This is why the people in their business, even when the price of a thing is very high, never fail to respect their agreement."⁵

The '*ulamā*, were naturally the guardians of socio-religious

¹ Dulla Majlis, quoted in S.A. Bhuiyan, *Bānglā Sāhityer Itikathā*, Dacca, 1971, pp.136-37.

² Tr. by P.C. Baghchi in *Visvabhārati Annals*, Vol.1., 1945, p.99.

³ Fei-Sin's account (*Sing cha'a sheng lan*), compiled in 1436, *ibid.*, 122.

⁴ Huan Sing-ts'eng's account (*Si yang ch'ao kung lu*), compiled in 1520, *ibid.*, 124.

⁵ Yen Ts'ong-kien's account (*Shu yu chou tseu lu*), compiled in 1574, *ibid.*, 131.

life of the Muslims. Each important village or settlement appears to have a head *‘ālim* who came to be known as *mulla*. The *mulla* of that time was a well-educated person with commendable knowledge of the Qur’ān and *ḥadīth*. He acted as teacher to the people and as their *imām* in prayers. As such he commanded considerable respect and influence in the society. He also rendered some essential services like conducting a marriage ceremony, supervising the sacrifice of animals, specially at the time of the *‘Īd al-adḥā*, removing superstitious fears among the credulous inhabitants, etc. Poet Vijayagupta (17th century) writes about a village thus: “There was a *mulla* named Taqai [Taqī] who was well-versed in the *kitāb* (Qur’ān). If the *qāḍī* of the place arranged a feast, the *mulla* was the first man to be invited. Unfolding the edge of his dress the *mulla* used to speak about many things; and after reciting the prescribed words he used to sacrifice the fowl.”¹ The poet further says: “The *qāḍī* had a teacher named Khalas [Khālīs] who had good knowledge of the *kitāb* and the Qur’ān.... The *mullā* said to the *qāḍī*: “if you ask me I would say, why are you afraid of demons when you have your *kitāb* (Qur’ān). Have extracts from it written and fastened to your neck; if then the demon (snake) strikes you, I shall be held responsible. The *mullā*’s words touched the mind of the *qāḍī* so that all those present took amulets.”² The superstitious fear of demons spoken of here has reference evidently to the *manasā* cult (snake-goddess) about which the poet writes and which spread in west Bengal in the 17th century. In any case the *mullā* did a good job by reminding the Muslims that they had nothing to fear from any evil spirit as long as they held fast to the Qur’ān. Some other services rendered by

¹ Vijayagupta, *Padma Purāna (Manasāmangala)*, ed. B.K. Bhattacharya, Barisal, n.d., 54. The passage runs as follows:

তকই নানে বোমা কিতাব ভাল জানে ।
কাহির বেঘমান হইলে আগে তারে জানে ॥
কাছা বুলিয়া বোমা ফরনার অনেক ।
জপ সাধ করি বোমা দ্বায়ে মোরগে ॥

² *Ibid.*, p.61. The passage reads as follows:

কাহির গুস্তাফ এক নানেতে বালাস ।	কেস্তার লিখিয়া দাত হইল দেন থাকে ।
কেস্তাব কোরাণে তার বড়ই অভ্যাস ॥	তবে যদি ভুটে লঙ্ঘ্যে সে শেষ মোরে লাগে ॥
.....	বোমার বচন এখন কাহির মনে লয় ।
বোমা বলে আনারে জিজ্ঞাসা যদি কর ।	তাবিখ লিখিয়া গুস্তাফ সকলেই লয় ॥
কেস্তাব থাকিতে কেন ভুটের ভরে বয় ॥	

the *mulla* are alluded to by the 16th century poet Mukundarām. He says that the *mullā* used to perform the *nikāh* ceremony and receive a quarter of a rupee as his remuneration. He also sacrificed fowls, goats and other animals and received specified payments.¹ Obviously the *mullā* was called in for such acts as sacrificing of fowls, goats, etc. because the Muslims attached due importance to the Quranic injunction that the meat of these animals was permissible as food only if they were properly killed in the name of Allah. Besides these acts there are also reference to the *mullās* being entrusted with more responsible jobs like the supervision and management of endowments connected with mosques and *madrasas*. For instance the Sāt-gāon inscription of Sultan Nuṣrat Shāh dated Ramaḍān 936/May 1529 invokes the curse of Allah if any of the *mullās* or officers embezzled the income of the endowment for the *jāmi'* mosque erected at that place.² It is thus clear that the *mullā* had a recognized position in the socio-religious life of the Muslims. There is no evidence to show, however, that the *mullās* formed a class by themselves, nor were they such unenviable figures as many of their later namesakes in Bengal appear to be.

The Muslims in pre-Mughal Bengal were *Sunnīs* following, as stray references in the sources indicate, the *Ḥanafī* school of thought.³ *Shī'as* made their appearance in the Mughal period, mainly since the reign of Jahāngīr. According to the *Ṣubḥ-i-Ṣādiq*, Prince Shujā' brought with him a large number of *Shī'a* officers and nobles, and himself married one after another two *Shī'a* wives. There is a tradition current in Dacca that "Shujā' brought with him three hundred *Shī'a* nobles whom he settled in different parts of the country."⁴ The *Shī'a* influx grew stronger during the time of Murshid Qulī Khān and his successor *Nawwābs* of Murshidabad. Being themselves of *Shī'a* Persian origin these Murshidabad rulers encouraged many *Shī'a* families of Persia,

¹ Mukundarāma, *Kavikankan Chandī*, Calcutta, n.d., p.86.

² *J.A.S.B.*, 1870, pp.297-98.

³ See for instance Daulat Qāzī, *Satī-Maynā O Lor-Chandrānī*, quoted in S.A. Bhuiyān, *op.cit.*, p.109.

⁴ A. Halim, "An account of the celebrities of Bengal during the early years of Shāh Jahān's reign", *J.P.H.S.*, Vol.I., Oct.1953,p.356.

besides their own relatives, to come and settle in Bengal. Nonetheless, the *Shī'as* formed (and do still form) a very small, almost negligible, fraction of the Muslim population of Bengal. They are scattered mostly in Dacca, Murshidabad and Hugli regions.

In general the sources make it clear that the Bengal Muslims observed Islamic principles and practices. This is true also of the womenfolk who, in consonance with the teachings of Islam, observed *purdah* (veil) and otherwise conformed to the Islamic standards in dress and manners. As late as the period of the Murshidabad Nawwābs the system of *purdah* was scrupulously observed. According to the *Siyar* 'Alīvardī Khān did not enter the female apartments (*zenāna*) without giving notice to his Begam lest other ladies should fall in his way. He also asked his grandson Sirāj al-Daulah not to visit his grandmother without prior notice so long as the families of the defeated Afghans lived in the palace.¹ It is further on record that though Nawāzish Muḥammad Khān ('Alīvardī Khān's eldest son-in-law) adopted as his mother Nafīsa Begam, (Sarfarāz Khān's sister) that lady did never appear before him. "What is extraordinary," writes the *Siyar*, "this adoption did not extend to her ever appearing in his presence or to her ever been so much as seen by him. There always intervened a veil or a curtain between them, even whilst she was rendering him an account of his family, and whilst expressions of the mother and the son were continually interchanging."² Such being the case with the ruling family, the example must have been followed by the aristocracy and generality of the Muslims. The system of *purdah* did not mean however that the ladies were "carefully shut up", as the European traveller Barbosa would have us believe.³ On the contrary they had a respectable position in society and enjoyed a good deal of initiative and independence in social and political affairs as well as in their personal matters. According to the laws of Islam women inherited and owned property. We come across in the sources the instances of a number of ladies, including

¹ *Siyar*, II, pp. 28, 58-59.

² *Ibid.*, I, pp. 355-356.

³ *Barbosa*, Hakluyt Society, II, p. 148.

'Alivardī Khān's daughter Ghaseti Begam, owning vast properties and managing their estates through agents. Some of them took part in political affairs. Murshid Qulī Khān's daughter Zīnat al-Nisā', for instance, used to help and advise her husband Shujā' al-Dīn Khān in matters of administration. Similarly the latter's daughter, Dardanā Begam, helped her husband Murshid Qulī Khān II in the administration of Orissa, and played an important role in inducing him to oppose 'Alivardī Khān's capture of the *masnad* of Bengal.¹ 'Alivardī Khān's wife Sharaf al-Nisā' was an equally talented lady who accompanied him in his campaigns against the Marathas and conducted diplomatic negotiations with their leaders.² The widow of Ghauth Khān, Sarfarāz Khān's general, saved her house in Bhagalpur against the Maratha attacks by an uncommon bravery.³ Even in the field of education women did not lag behind. Respectable families had their daughters suitably educated. According to the Bengali work *Gadā Mallikār Punthi*, Mallikā, a talented lady, married 'Abd Allah Gadā, because he alone of all the contestants succeeded in answering her thousand questions on religious and social riddles.⁴ Polygamy was of course in vogue, as was the system of remarriage of widows.

III: INNOVATIONS AND UN-ISLAMIC PRACTICES

Although in general the Muslims of Bengal followed the injunctions of Islam, certain innovations and un-Islamic practices were prevalent among them, particularly later in the period. The existence of such innovations and superstitions have too often been explained as the result of the Bengal Muslims' being mostly converts from Hindus etc. who are said to have retained many of their previous un-Islamic beliefs and practices. Such a view is clearly superficial. A little closer look would at once show that the innovations and superstitions that are noticeable among the Muslims of Bengal were in a large measure imported by the immigrant Muslims themselves, though these received further

¹ *Siyar*, II, 355.

² *Ibid.*, II, 11-13.

³ *Ibid.*, I, 418.

⁴ S.S. Husain, *A Descriptive Catalogue of Bengali Manuscripts*, Dacca, 1960, 110.

accretions from local un-Islamic beliefs and practices.

Of the innovations that definitely came along with the immigrant Muslims and that which was the most far-reaching in its effects and influence was *ṣūfism*. There is a considerable literature on the subject in various languages, and it is not necessary here to enter into the academic debate as to whether *ṣūfism* grew out of European or Indian influences. Suffice it note here that Islam does not countenance asceticism and mysticism. Yet from the second century of its history these two trends made their inroads into the ranks of the Muslims and in course of time there came into being a class of mystics known as *ṣūfīs*.¹ As time went on the *ṣūfīs* formed themselves into groups or orders, each named after its founder. Of such orders four, namely, (i) the *Suhrawardiyah*, (ii) the *Qādiriyah*, (iii) the *Chishtiyah* and (iv) the *Naqshbandiyah* appear to have exerted great influence in the south Asian subcontinent.² Each of these orders has again a number of subdivisions or branches. In Bengal *ṣūfism* made its influence felt quite early in the period, almost from the beginning. Ikhtiyār al-Dīn Muhammad Bakhtiyār Khaljī, founder of Muslim rule in Bengal, is stated to have caused the construction, among other structures, of *khānqahs* which term generally means the meditating abodes of *ṣūfīs*. An interest in mysticism was definitely shown by the *qāḍī* of Lakhnawati, Qāḍī Rukn al-Dīn al-Samarqandī, who, while converting the Bhojār Brahman of Kāmṛūpa to Islam, also caused the Sanskrit *yogic* work *Amritkunda* to be translated into Arabic and Persian as early as the time of 'Alī Mardān Khaljī (1210-1213 A.C.).³

The sources at our disposal do not help us in tracing any gradual development of *ṣūfism* in Bengal though there are unmistakable references to it. This is one of the reasons why most of the pioneers of Muslim settlements, *shaikhs* and administrators whose names have come down to us through inscriptions found at

¹ The term *Ṣūfī* is supposed to be derived from *Ṣūṭ*, a coarse and undyed garment of wool originally worn by those mystics, or from *Ṣafā*, meaning "purity".

² Shaikh Shihab al-Dīn Suhrawardī (d. 1235 A.C.) is regarded as the founder of the *Suhrawardiyah* order; while Shaikh 'Abd al-Qādir Gilanī (1078-1168 A.C.), Khwajā Bahā al-Dīn Naqshband of Turkistan (d. 1388 A.C.) and Khwajā Mu'in al-Dīn Chishtī (1142-1236 A.C.) are regarded as the founders respectively of the *Qādiriyah*, *Naqshbandiyah* and *Chishtiyah* orders.

³ See *supra*. pp. 782-783.

their last resting places or in mosques founded by them, and who have been briefly noticed in the previous chapter, have been generalized as *ṣūfīs* even in recent works.¹ As already pointed out, many of these personalities have been invested with mystical and legendary characters by later popular traditions. Nonetheless there is no denying the fact that some at least of them did have *ṣūfistic* inclinations. For instance Shaikh Sharaf al-Dīn Abū Tawwāmah, founder of the Sunārgāon Academy (late thirteenth century), wrote a book on *taṣawwuf* entitled *Maqāmāt*.² His most well-known student, Sharaf al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn Yaḥyā Manerī (1263-1381), besides being an *‘ālim*, was clearly a *ṣūfī* as his writings show.³ A more definite reference to the existence of various *ṣūfī* groups in Bengal is given by Mīr Sayyid Ashraf Jahāngīr Simnānī, a distinguished student of Shaikh ‘Alā’ al-Ḥaq of Pandua, and a friend of the latter’s son Shaikh Nūr Quṭb al-‘Ālam. Supporting the latter’s appeal for help to the Jaunpur Sultān against Rājā Kāns’s usurpation,⁴ Simnānī urged the Jaunpur ruler to intervene in Bengal affairs stating:⁵

“God be praised. What a good land is that of Bengal where numerous saints [*ṣūfīs*]⁶ and ascetics came from many directions and made it their habitation and home. For example at Devgaon seventy leading disciples of the Shaikh of Shaikhs Hazrat Shaikh Shihābuddin Suhrawardī are taking their eternal rest. Several saints [*ṣūfīs*] of the Suhrawardī order are lying buried in Mahisun and this is the case with the saints [*ṣūfīs*] of the Jalālīa order in Deotala. In Narkoti some of the best companions of the Shaikh of Shaikhs Ahmad Damishqī are found. Hazrat Shaikh Sharfuddin Tawwama, one of the twelve of the Qadarkhānī order whose chief pupil was Hazrat Shaikh Sharfuddin Manerī is lying buried at Sonargaon. And then there were Hazrat Bad Alam and Badr Alam Zahidi. In short, in the country of Bengal what to speak of the cities there is no town and no village where holy saints [*ṣūfīs*] did not come and settle down. Many of the saints of the Suhrawardī order are dead and gone under earth but those still alive are also in fairly large number.”

The *Suhrawardiya* order mentioned in the letter is well-known; whereas the *Jalālīa* order seems to have reference to the disciples of

¹ See for instance M. Enamul Haq, *Bange Sufi Prabhāva*, Calcutta, 1935.

² *J.A.S.B.*, 1923, 274, 277.

³ See his *Maktūbāt-i-Ṣadī* (*The Hundred Letters*), Urdu translation, Bihar Sharif, 1926; English translation (Paul Jackson and others), London, 1980.

⁴ *Supra*, pp. 151-155.

⁵ Quoted and translated by S. Hasan Askari, *B.P.P.*, LXVII, 1948, 35-36.

⁶ The term “saint” appears to be a mistaken translation for *Sufi*.

Shaikh Jalāl al-Dīn Tabrīzī in whose honour Deotala was called Tabrīzābād. We do not possess, however, further information about those *ṣūfīs* and their views. One thing is clear, however. Those early *ṣūfīs* in Bengal did not divorce themselves from the *sharī'a*. They were almost all 'ulamā' of the first order, devoted to the inculcation of a knowledge of the Qur'ān and *ḥadīth*, and were based almost invariably at mosques. The situation of course changed with the progress of time and from the sixteenth century onwards we get a picture of a very different kind of *ṣūfism* which, under the influence of Hindu *yogism* and *tāntrikism* degenerated into heterodox mysticism. Many of those who in later times passed under the name of *ṣūfīs* were uneducated or half-educated persons who had succumbed to the ideas of *yogism*, the *Bhakti* cult and *Vaishnavism*.

An upshot of *ṣūfism* was *pīrism*. The word *pīr* means "old" (equivalent to the Arabic word *shaikh*), but technically it stood for a spiritual guide. It was believed by many that no true religious knowledge or spiritual advancement could be had without the instrumentality of a *pīr*. Sometimes *ṣūfīs* are understood in the sense of *pīrs*. Even a section of the apparently educated people believed in *pīrism*. Poets like Shāh Muḥammad Ṣaghīr, Ālāol, Shaikh Chānd, Sayyid Sulṭān, Zain al-Dīn, Muḥammad Khān, etc.,¹ make respectful mention in their works about their *pīrs*. The concept of *pīr* was of foreign (specially Persian) origin; but it found a fertile soil in Bengal in that both Hindus and Buddhists had identical beliefs in *avatārs* and "saints". In consonance with such beliefs many Hindu writers fostered the idea and depicted Muslim heroes and *shaikhs* with legendary embellishments. The cumulative effect of all these was the growth of another superstitious practice (not necessarily peculiar to Bengal alone, nor even confined to the local converts)² of sanctifying the graves of real or imaginary *pīrs* and *ṣūfīs*, or even of known historical

¹ See *infra*, pp. 860-867.

² The superstitious practice of sanctifying graves of the ancients was prevalent in other countries. A number of the Bengal Sultāns, who were by no means local converts, are mentioned in the sources as paying visits to such *dargāhs*. The Mughal emperor Akbar used to pay visits even on foot to the *dargāhs* of Khwāja Mu'in al-Dīn Chīshṭī and Shaikh Selim Chīshṭī after whose name Prince Selim (subsequently emperor Jahāngīr) was so named.

figures. Often designated as *dargāhs*, these graves were visited by Hindus as well as many credulous Muslims.¹ It is noteworthy that a good number of such *dargāhs* in Bengal are found to exist on the sites of ancient *stupas* or mounds.² Visits to the *dargāhs* were considered to be of religious merits, and offerings of various sorts were made there in solicitation of the *pīr*'s intercession for such special divine blessings as the birth of a child or cure for a chronic illness. At some places in northern and western Bengal the concept of an imaginary *pīr* called *Satya Pīr* (true *pīr*), which is almost synonymous with the Hindu concept of *Satya Nārāyana*, was prevalent.³ A good many Hindu writers specially dealt with that theme with a view, as it appears, to neutralize the effect and force of Islam.⁴ Another variety of *pīrism* was a belief in *Pāñch Pīr* (five *pīrs*) of which neither the origin nor the list of names included in the five are clear. In the riverine east and south Bengal some people believed in *Pīr Badr* and *Kālu* whose intercessions were sought for safety respectively on rivers and in forests. The credulity and superstitiousness of some people found expression also through the absurd concept of *pīrs* personified in horses (*ghorā pīr*) and tortoise (*mādāri pīr*).⁵

Another superstitious innovation, not quite of local origin but having local parallels, was reverence to the supposed foot-prints of the Prophet (*Qadam-Rasūl*). The earliest indication of the idea is found on a coin of Jalāl al-Dīn Fath Shāh (886-892/1481-1486) wherein he mentions himself as one who waits on the *Qadam-i-Rasūl*.⁶ Next in point of time is perhaps the Hajī Bābā Ṣāliḥ inscription at Sunārgāon dated 912/1506 which

¹ See *P.A.S.B.*, 1870, p.114.

² See Prabhās Chandra Sen, "Mahāsthān and its environs", *V.R.S. Monograph*, No. 2, Rajshahi, 1929, p.4; and N.K. Dikshit, *Memoirs of the Archaeological Survey of India*, No.55, Delhi, 1938, p.80.

³ M. Enamul Haq, *Bange Ṣūfī Prabhāva*, Calcutta, 1935, p.241; and *Muslim Bānglā Sāhitya*, Dacca, 1955, pp.113-114. See also D.C. Sen, *History of the Bengali Language and Literature*, Calcutta University, 1911, p.797. Sen suggests without evidence that Sultān 'Alā' al-Dīn Husain Shāh originated the *Ṣatya Pīr* movement. For a list of Bengali works relating to *Satya Pīr* cult see Sukumar Sen, *Bānglā Sāhityer Itihāsa*, Calcutta, 1949, pp. 432 ff.

⁴ See for instance *Satya Pīr Pāñchālī* by Bhāratchandra & Sivaprasad Bhattacharya, *Bharatchandra O Rāmpasād*, Calcutta, 1967, pp.220-224.

⁵ M. Enamul Haq, *Bange Ṣūfī Prabhāva*, Calcutta, 1935, pp.238-40.

⁶ *J.A.S.B.*, 1890, p.173.

mentions him as one who had performed a pilgrimage to the two Holy Cities (Makka and Madina) and also visited the "two foot-prints" (حاجى الحرمين وزائر القديمين).¹ But the most concrete relic of the superstition is the *Qadam Rasūl Building* at Gaud carefully built by Sulṭān Nāṣir al-Dīn Nuṣrat Shāh in 937/1530-31 for the specific purpose, as the inscription on it records, of preserving the "stone, on which is the foot-print of the Prophet, may the blessings and peace of Allah rest on him..."² It is also said that the stone was brought from Arabia by one Makhdūm Jahāniyān Jahāngasht, who himself has of course been elevated by popular tradition to the rank of a *pīr*.³ Two other buildings said to contain stones bearing foot-prints of the Prophet are in existence. The one is at Nabiganj, also called Rasūlpur, near Narayanganj (Dacca district), and the other is a room attached to a mosque erected in 1136/1719 in the Raḥmatganj locality of Chittagong city, for which it is generally known as the *Qadam Mubārak Masjid*. The "foot-print" deposited at Nabiganj is stated to have been obtained at a high price by Ma'sūm Khān Kābulī, the rebel Mughal army officer in Bengal, from some merchants coming from Arabia. It is further stated that Prince Shāh Jahān, while in Bengal in the course of his rebellion, visited the place, offered "many prayers" there and paid the *khādims* of the place a present of one thousand *darbs* (half rupees).⁴ During 'Alīvardī Khān's time an Iranian middle-man living in Patna (Azimabad) is said to have in his dwelling place "an impression of the holy foot."⁵ This innovation has its counter-part in the reverence paid by the Buddhists to the Buddha's foot-prints and, to some extent, in the Hindu tradition about Rāma's wooden sandal.

IV: INFLUENCE OF ISLAM ON HINDUISM

As already indicated, most of the more harmful innovations

¹ *Ibid.*, 1873, p. 283.

² *Ibid.*, 1872, p. 338. The inscription runs as follows:

قال الله تعالى من جاء بالحسنة فله عشر امثالها - بنى هذه الصفة المطهرة وحجرتها التي فيه اثر قدم رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم السلطان المعظم المكرم السلطان ابن السلطان ناصر الدنيا والدين أبو المظفر نصرتشاه السلطان بن حسين شاه السلطان بن سيد اشرف الحسيني خلد الله ملكه وسلطانه وأعل أمره وشأنه - في سنة سبع وثلاثين وتسعمائة.

³ *Memoirs*, 61-64.

⁴ *B.G.*, 710.

⁵ *Siyar*, II, 34-35.

were not local in origin, but they found substantial support and parallel in Hindu customs and traditions. However, Islam shook Hinduism at its foundation. The simple concept of monotheism and the principles of equality and brotherhood of man enunciated by Islam came as a revolutionary force to the caste-ridden and Brahman-dominated Hindu society. The very establishment of Muslim rule in the country divested the Brahman class of its privileged and domineering position in the society. Muslims could not and did not have to distinguish between the "high" and "low" castes of the Hindus and in course of time placed all of them on an equal footing in respect of employment and education. Non-Brahman Hindus acquired a respectable position in society through education, state employment and literary activities patronized by the Muslim rulers.¹ In simple terms there was a sort of liberation of the general Hindu mind from the age-old intellectual bondage imposed by Brahmanism. The Brahmans themselves did not fail to recognize the new social forces. They not only tolerated the study and cultivation of their sacred literature by the "low-caste" Hindus, now made possible under the patronage of the new rulers, but also joined the queue for a literary and religious revival of Hinduism as a whole. Many of the Brahmans even found it practical and wise to imitate the Muslims in dress and manners. In the later Ilyās Shāhī period some Braman *pandits* even attempted to relax the rigours of caste rules (*kūlīnism*) by prescribing, among other things, that a Brahman's orthodoxy and *kūlīnism* would not be compromised by his having received titles from Muslim rulers.²

But more important than this, under the equalizing spirit of Islam and the liberalism of the Muslim rulers Hinduism found a scope to build up a resistance to the progress of Islam itself. Broadly, this process of Hindu revival took three forms. In the first place, there was an enthusiastic, or even conscious, support for such innovations among the Muslims as *pīrism* and mysticism which fell in line with Hindu legends and traditions. In fact the

¹ See *infra*, pp.856-859.

² N.N. Basu, *Bānglār Jātiya Itihāsa, Brāhmankānda*, I., 1984, quoted in A. Rahim, *op.cit.*, I., 316.

writings of some Hindu poets betray a calculated move to incorporate in the Hindu pantheon Muslim *pīrs* and *ṣūfīs*. Along with this process there was a popularization through the writings of Hindu scholars of their mythological stories and legends. It would be seen in a later chapter that some Muslim writers and poets attempted to counteract the influence of the Hindu legends by writing on themes drawn from Islamic history and tradition; but the intellectual atmosphere had already been so vitiated that most of those Muslim poets could not extricate themselves from the influence of *pīrism*, and often mystified Muslim historical figures into legendary characters.¹ Secondly, there was an equally remarkable introduction of some new cults which combined elements from Islam with Hinduism. Reference has already been made to the *Satya Pīr* cult. Another was the *Dharma* cult. It was set on foot in the 15th century. It discarded the caste system, emphasized the idea of equality of man and advocated the worship of one god called *Dharma Thākura* who was stated to have an eternal soul and an all-embracing existence but no visible form or figure. The *Dharmites* also held Friday as auspicious, showed some respect for the western direction (that incidentally being the direction of the *qibla* from Bengal), and adopted the practice of sacrificing goats, ducks, etc. for food by cutting their necks in a particular manner.² The cult flourished mainly in west Bengal and its devotees produced a good deal of literature on it. The third form of revival was the reform of Hinduism itself typified by the *Vaishnava* movement of Chaitanya. In all these three aspects, however, it was through the channel of *ṣūfism* mainly that Hinduism not only defended itself but also made serious incursions into Islam in Bengal.

The *Vaishnava* movement was started by Śrī Chaitanya of Nadia. *Vaishnavism* as a concept with its emphasis on the *Rādhā-Krishna* cult was known in earlier times; but Chaitanya gave it a new interpretation and force. Born of a Brahman family of Nadia in 1484, Chaitanya came out in the open with his new doctrines early in the 16th century, during the reign of Sulṭān

¹ *Infra*, pp. 874-875.

² S.B. Dasgupta, *Obscure Religious Cults*, Calcutta University, 1946, 265-67.

'Alā' al-Dīn Ḥusain Shāh.¹ Like the *Dharmites*, Chaitanya also enunciated the doctrine of one god, but cast it clearly in the Hindu mould of *avatārisim* by stating that that one god was incarnated in Krishna. Next, borrowing from the *ṣūfī* doctrine of 'ishq (love) as the means of attaining union with God (*waḥdat al-wujūd*), Chaitanya emphasized the doctrine of love as the only means of spiritual attainment and held that the love between Krishna and Rādhā, as described in the Hindu mythology, represented that divine love. Also, evidently drawing his idea from the *sam'* (ecstatic music) of the Chīshtiyah and Suhrawardiyah *ṣūfīs*, Chaitanya introduced a system of congregational singing and dancing expressing love for Krishna which was called *kīrtan*. He went a step further by conducting such *kīrtan* parties in processions through towns and villages (often called *nagar kīrtan*). He also discarded the caste system and accepted men of all castes as his disciples.

Vaishnavism was launched primarily to check the progress of Islam. Hence it assumed a somewhat aggressive attitude from the beginning. Almost for the first time we find in the Vaishnava literature the use of such derisive terms as *yavanas* and *mlechchas* applied to Muslims in general. The attitude of Chaitanya himself appears to be that of a communally inspired leader rather than that of a religious reformer. Such at least is the picture of him that emerges from the *Vaishnava* literature itself. It is stated that a conservative section of the Hindus of Nadia, feeling disturbed by Chaitanya's *kīrtan* processions, petitioned the *qāḍī* of the place to put a stop to that novel practice.² Acting on that petition and desiring to prevent any breach of the peace the *qāḍī* passed orders prohibiting the *nagar kīrtan* (town processions). Thereupon Chaitanya directed his anger not against the opposing Hindus but against the *qāḍī* and the Muslims of the locality generally. The professed reformer asked his followers to lead a procession through the city in violation of the judicial orders, and also directed them to capture and execute the *qāḍī* and otherwise "clear

¹ See S.K. De, *Early History of the Vaishnava Faith and Movement in Bengal*, Calcutta, 1942.

² Krishna Dāsa Kavirāja, *Chaitanya Charitāmrita*, Ādi, 7th; Brindāvana Dāsa, *Chaitanya Bhāgavata*, Madhya Khanda, 23rd Chapter.

the earth of the *yavanas* (Muslims)."¹ This was accordingly done and the *qāḍī*'s residence in the nearby village of Simulia was attacked and burnt down. All the Muslim villagers including the *qāḍī* fled from the place². The *Vaishnava* literature also gives accounts of Chaitanya's religious debates with a *qāḍī* and another Muslim (Turk). Whether this and the above mentioned Nadia *qāḍī* were the same person is not clear. If so the disputation must have taken place before the ransacking of the Simulia village at Chaitanya's instance. Be that as it may, the *Vaishnava* literature of course represents Chaitanya as having defeated his opponents in the disputation and succeeded in proving what is called the superiority of *Vaishnavism* over Islam.³ The merits of such claims apart, they show the anti-Islamic spirit with which the movement was launched. There are also indications that Chaitanya attempted to subvert the Muslim state of Bengal. His journey to and stay in Orissa at a time when Sultān 'Alā' al-Dīn Husain Shāh had been engaged in a war with that country could not have been just a simple missionary tour. Moreover Chaitanya's visit to Gauḍ after his return from Orissa, his meeting there with Rūp and Sanātan, two Hindu ministers of Husain Shāh, and their desertion and escape to Brindāvan shortly afterwards, were not merely isolated events without any significance.

It did not take long for Chaitanya's followers to elevate him to the rank of Krishna's successor as an incarnation of god. And soon enough *Vaishnavism* also incorporated in its system *yogism*

¹ *Ibid.*, Chaitanya's words are thus reproduced by the poet:

চোখে বলে প্রভু, আরে কাজি বেটা কোথা।	বেখো মোর কি করে উহার নরপতি।
কাট আন বরিয়া, কাটিয়া ফেল মাথা॥	দেখো আজি কোন জনে করে অবাহতি॥
নির্ব্বন করে। আজি সকল ভূবন।	অগ্নি দেহ তোরা ঘরে না করিছ ভয়।
পূর্বে বেন বধ কৈল সে কাল যবন॥	আজি সব যবনের করিম প্রলয়॥
ভাগিলেক যত সব বাহিরের ঘর।	কাজিকে করিয়া পণ্ড সর্ব লোক বার।
প্রভু বলে, অগ্নি দেহ বাড়ীর ভিতর॥	সংকীর্তন বসে সম্বরণে নাচি বার॥
পাড়িয়া মরুক সর্বগণের সহিতে।	কাজির ভাগিয়া ঘর সম্ব' নগরিয়া।
সব বাড়ী বেড়ি অগ্নি দেহ চারিভিতে॥	মহাসঙ্গে হরি বলি যাবেন নাচিয়া॥

² *Ibid.* Also Jayananda Misra, *Chaitanyamangal*, p.147. It was most probably after this incident, and presumably at the intercession of his Hindu ministers Rupa and Sanatan, that Husain Shāh gave Chaitanya complete freedom to preach his doctrines in Bengal.

³ *Chaitanya Charitāmrita*, Ādi 17th, and Madhya 18th. See also J.N. Sarkar, *Chaitanya's Pilgrimages and Teachings* (English translation of *Madhya-līlā* of *Chaitanya Charitāmrita*), London, 1913, pp.226-227.

and Buddhist *tāntrikism*; and in the name of divine love encouraged illicit sexual relationships among the members of its esoteric order. In this changed aspect it drew to it a variety of people from different sections of the Hindu society. Its mystic-yogic ideas with an admixture of the philosophy of love found a rather close parallel in the degenerated *ṣūfism* of the day. One outcome of the interaction of this *ṣūfism* with *Vaishnavism* was the rise of a heterodox *faqīrism* (mendicancy) which neglected the rules of the *sharī'a* and concentrated on contemplative mysticism. A by-product of this *faqīrism* was the growth of a new mystic order called *Bāuls*¹ with similar ideas in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. *Vaishnavism* even succeeded in confusing a few persons born of Muslim families. Their writings show clearly that they had moved far away from Islam.² Such heterodoxies were confined, however, to a microscopic minority of the Muslims. The vast majority of them remained unaffected by *faqīrism* and *bāulism*. Nor did the majority of Hindus ever subscribe to Chaitanya's *Vaishnavism*. It would therefore be incorrect to suggest, as some appear to do, that the heterodoxies represent a common Hindu-Muslim culture.

V: DAILY LIFE OF THE MUSLIMS

We get from the sources some good glimpses about the Muslims' daily life, particularly about their language, dress, dwellings and diet. As already indicated, from the very beginning the Muslims meant to settle in the land. This attitude explains their early patronage and cultivation of the local language, Bengali, along with Arabic and Persian, which of course continued to be the languages of administration and culture and which were studied by both the immigrant and local Muslims with all seriousness. The Chinese accounts which refer to the early fifteenth century speak about the universal use of Bengali (*P'ang-Kie-li*) along with Persian (*Pa-eul-si* = Farsi = Persian).³

¹ See for instance U.N. Bhattacharya, *Vāṅglār Vāul O Vāul Gān*, (Bengali text), Calcutta, B.E. 1364.

² See J.M. Bhattacharya, *Vāṅglār Vaishnava Bhāvēpanna Musalmān Kavi*, (Bengali text), Calcutta, B.E. 1365.

³ V.B.A., I. 1945, 117, 124.

For the same reasons the Muslims did not confine themselves to official situations alone but engaged themselves in other professions like agriculture, trade and commerce, artisanship, weaving, etc. According to Firishta Prince Nāṣir al-Dīn of the Ilyās Shāhī dynasty had been engaged in agriculture before he was restored to the throne after the rule of Rājā Kāns and his successors.¹ There are numerous other references in the sources to the Muslims' owning lands, taking to trade and commerce and similar other occupations. Poet Mukundarām's composition contains an interesting passage throwing light on the various occupations of the rural Muslims of his locality. He says: "There are some who act as milk-men (*goālā*) though they regularly say their prayers and keep fast. Others are engaged in the occupation of weaving and are known as *jolā*. Those who drive bullock (carts) are called *mukeri*. Some sell cakes and go by the name of *pīthāri*; while those who sell fish are called *kābāri*. They are expert in telling lies and do not grow beards. Those of the Hindus who become Muslims are called *gharsāl*. Those who go on begging at night are known as *kāl*. The loom-makers are known as *sānākārs* who depend on weavers for livelihood. Some peddle around towns with their paintings, while others make bows and as such are called *tīrkārs*. Those who make papers are called *kāgchā*. The *qalandars* wander from place to place. Some people are engaged in dyeing cloths and are called *rangrez*. They wear red turbans on their heads and look very manly. Some do the work of circumcision and are called *hājīām*. They are constantly on the move from one town to another and have no rest. The *darzi*'s (tailor's) work is to cut cloths and sew them (for making dresses); while those who weave *neāls*(?) are called *beuta*. So the Muslims settled down with many professions. Listen carefully to this account as written by a Hindu."²

¹ *Firishta*, II. 298.

² Mukundarām Chakravartī *Chandikāvya*, quoted in J.N. Das Gupta, *op.cit.*, 91 n. The passage runs as follows:

যোদ্ধা নবাব করি কেহ বটল খোলা ।
তাসন কবিলা নাম বলাইল খোলা ।
বলব সাহিবা কেহ বলাইল মুকেরি ।
পিঠা বেড়িয়া নাম কেহ বলাইল পিঠারি ।

মংত্র বেড়ি নাম কেহ বলাইল কাগচি ।
নিরবর বিখ্যা কহে সাহি বাগে বাড়ি ।
হিন্দু হয়ে মুসলমান হইল দার ।
নিলাকালে ভিন্দা নামে নাম করে দার ।

সানো বাঁধ নাম বলাইল সানাকর ।
কৌবল উপায় তার পেয়ে তাঁতি বর ।
পট পড়িয়া বুলে কেহ বলাইল বর ।
তৌকর হয়ে কেহ বলাইল তৌকর ।

The passage is significant as showing that though the Muslims formed a distinct and compact community of their own, there came into being various professional groups among them. In course of time the respective occupational skills tended naturally to be transmitted from father to son so that these groups became more or less hereditary as noticed late in the nineteenth century.¹ There is no evidence to show, however, that these groups assumed in any way mutual exclusiveness characteristic of the Hindu caste system. Secondly, the poet's reference to converts from Hinduism as a district class called *gharsal*² is noteworthy. While it shows that there were conversions from Hinduism to Islam, it also indicates, more significantly, that the other groups mentioned by the poet were not so; that is, by implication, they were Muslims of foreign origin. Thirdly, the existence of a class of nocturnal beggars and of *qalandars* indicates religious mendicancy rather than poverty of the masses.

As regards dress Islam sets a specific standard even for men who are particularly required to cover their body at least from waist to knee inclusive. This requirement militated against the adoption or continuation of the local practice of wearing a loin-cloth above the knee or a long sheet of cloth called *dhuti* by passing one end of it in between the legs (*kāchhā*) which results in the exposure of parts of the thighs. The Muslims stressed also the wearing of a head-gear (cap or turban). The dresses worn by the Muslims conformed to these requirements and were as such points of special notice by the Hindu Bengali poets. Mukundarām's reference to the Muslims' wearing of trousers and caps and

== কাপড় খুঁটা নাম ধরাই কাপটা ।
কলশ হরে কেহ গিরে গিলাতি ।
বসন ওসারে কেহ ধরে বহরবর
লোতিও বসন গিরে ধরে মছাভেজ

হুস্তত করিয়া নাম ধরাই হুস্তত ।
সহরে সহরে গিরে না করে গিলাতি ।
কটিয়া কাপড় ছোটে করিয়া বটা ।
বেহান খুঁটিয়া নাম ধরাই বে-টা ।

নামা হুস্তি করিয়া বসিল মুসলমান ।
সামান্য হরে পুন কিশুর বাধান ।
অহরায় চঃপে যজুক বিল চিত ।
ঐকনিকতন নাম যদুয় সতীত ।

The text published by Bangabasi Kāryālaya, Calcutta, n.d. (p. 86) differs slightly in that in the first line an additional word "no" appears giving the meaning that the *Goalas* did not say prayers nor kept fast; and after the twelfth line there are two lines in addition which say: "Some sell beef and are called *Kasāi*; they will have no place in the next world (*Yamapuri*)".

¹ James Wise, *Notes on Races, Castes and Trades of Eastern Bengal*, London, 1883, 68.

² The meaning of the term *Gharsal* is not clear. J.N. Das Gupta translates it as "mixed" (*op. cit.*, 92); while A. Karim (*op. cit.*, 157) thinks it to be a corruption of *gol-sāz* (fire-work maker). Most probably *Gharsal* is a corruption of the Arabic or Persian expression *Ghair Ṣilah* (without any bond), that is, casteless.

of their cutting of hairs and growing of beards has been noted above. Also poet Vipradās's description of Taqai Mulla "unfolding the edge of his dress" (i.e., not following the practice of doing the *kāchhā*) is significant. Sometimes Muslim religious personages are described as wearing black attires with caps etc.¹ These descriptions are confirmed by the foreign accounts. "The men wear a white cotton turban and a long white cotton shirt," writes one Chinese observer. "On their feet they wear low sheep-skin shoes with gold thread. The smarter ones think it a correct thing to have designs on them... The women wear a short shirt, wrap around them a piece of cotton, silk or brocade. They do not use cosmetics, for they are naturally of a white complexion; in their ears they wear ear-rings of precious stones set in gold. Around their necks they hang pendants, and they do up their hair in knot behind. On their wrists and ankles are gold bracelets and on their fingers and toes rings."² Another Chinese account repeats the same description adding that all "men cut off their hairs and wrap their head with a cotton turban of white colour."³ Yet in another account it is noted: "The women put on short cloaks and scarfs of coloured cotton or silk with embroideries. They do not use any white cream but are naturally beautiful. They put on precious tiaras on the head, necklaces on the neck and dress their hairs in knot behind. They use bangles on the wrists and ankles and rings on fingers and toes."⁴ The European traveller Barbosa saw "respectable Moors walk about clad in white cotton smocks very thin, which come down to their ankles, and beneath these they have girdles of cloth, and over them silk scarves..."⁵

It may be assumed that the foreign observers' descriptions refer mainly to the wealthy and urban sections of the population with whom they came in contact; but the Bengali poet Mukundarām's similar accounts clearly refer to Muslims in a rural settlement. Therefore the fact that emerges is that the new type of

¹ Krishnadās Kavirāja, *Chaitanya Charitāmrita, Madhyalīlā*; also Sekh Subhodaya, *op. cit.*, 127.

² V.B.A., I, 1945, 131.

³ *Ibid.*, 124.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 132.

⁵ Barbosa, 147.

dress was introduced by the immigrant Muslims who were to be seen not only in the urban areas but also in rural settlements. The distinctive features of this dress were the head-gear (cap or turban) the trousers (*ijār*), and the long shirt or gown. These in their various makes and styles continued to be the dress pattern of the official and educated classes down to the the British period.¹ These styles were also imitated by the higher classes of the Hindus.² As regards the dress and ornaments of the cultivating classes and others of the rural population, these necessarily depended on the climatic and other material conditions under which they had to work and also on their financial circumstances. Nevertheless, judging from the present-day practice of many a Muslim cultivator in the southern and south-eastern districts it may be stated that a Bengali Muslim cultivator, even while working in watery and muddy fields, tried to conform to Islamic standards by covering his body at least from waist to knee and by wearing a cap on the head. The principal fabric worn by all was however cotton cloth, that being one of the main industries in Bengal throughout the period under review.

Similarly the dwelling houses of the Muslims were characterized by some special features. The main architectural styles and techniques introduced by them have been noted in a subsequent chapter. Here it may be noted that the dwellings of the official and aristocratic classes in towns and cities consisted mainly of brick-built structures with flat roofs in which lime was used not only for white-washing on walls but also as mortar. All the Chinese accounts unanimously testify to the grandeur and artistic luxury of the buildings in the capital city, particularly of the royal palace. "The dwelling of the king is all bricks set in mortar, the flight of steps leading up to it is high and broad," writes one observer. "The halls are flat-roofed and white-washed inside. The inner doors are of triple thickness and of nine panels. In the audience hall, the pillars are plated with brass, ornamented with

¹ See for instance the portraits of the later Nawwābs of Murshidabad.

² The best illustration of the point is the well-known portrait of Rājā Rammohan Roy, a nineteenth century Bengali Hindu reformer, not to speak of the more recent example of Nehru whose dress consisted of trousers, a long coat and a cap.

figures of flowers and animals, carved and polished. To the right and left are long verandahs on which are drawn up (on the occasion of our audience) over a thousand men in shining armour... To the right and left of the king were hundreds of peacock feather umbrellas and before the hall were some hundreds of soldiers mounted on elephants. The king sat cross-legged in the principal hall on a high throne inlaid with precious stones and a two-edged sword lay across his lap."¹ The houses in the rural areas were of course, as they are even to-day, generally made of bamboo and wood with either two-sided roofs sloping from a central and curved ridge, and having similarly curved eaves (called a *do-chālā* house), or four-sided sloping roofs (called a *chau-chālā* house). The roofs were made of bamboo or reed or leaves of a forest plant called *gol*. The curvature of the ridge and the eaves, and sloping of the roofs were all intended for the easy discharge of rain waters. The variety and quality of the houses and the materials used for their construction differed in accordance with the tastes and financial capabilities of the owners. As Abū al-Faḍl notes: "their houses are made of bamboos, some of which are so constructed that they last a long time."² But though the houses were made of the same materials and were generally of similar patterns, the dwellings of the Muslims were distinguished by some notable features. These were almost invariably surrounded by brick or earthen walls or by fencings of different kinds of plants and reeds. These were intended not so much for protection against burglary and theft as for the purposes of veiling the inmates from public view (*pardah*). Secondly a Muslim home had usually an outer house attached to it, called *dahliz* or *kāchhārī*, for the reception of visitors and guests. Thirdly, and arising out of the same need for *pardah*, almost every Muslim home had a tank excavated at the rear either within the surrounding wall or fencing or touching one end of it, with covered flights of steps in the latter instance. Duarte Barbosa noted this peculiarity and stated: "they bathe often in great tanks which they have in their houses."³

¹ Fei-Sin's account, *V.B.A.*, I., 1945, 121. The same description is given in Huan Sing-Tseng's account of 1520 and Yen Ts'ong-kien's account of 1574, *ibid.*, 124, 130-31.

² *Āin*, II., 134.

³ *Barbosa*, 147. Modern water-supply system which has facilitated the construction of

The staple article of food in Bengal has through ages been rice which, by all accounts, was produced in abundance in those days. There are some references to bread made of wheat and barley;¹ but from the context their consumption seems to have been limited to official and urban classes. Of vegetables we come across the mention specially of ginger, mustard, onions, garlic, cucumbers, egg-plants,² and a variety of green vegetables including the leaves of some plants (*sāk*). There was also a plentitude of milk, butter, ghee, honey, sugar-cane and sugar.³ Of fruits we get specific mention of mango, cocoanut, banana, pomegranate, different kinds of melons, prunes, *āmlaki*, "jack-fruits of big size and good sweet to the taste",⁴ and lemons and oranges.⁵ The protein side was amply supplied by an abundance of fish available from the rivers and coastal seas and meat consisting of beef, mutton, fowl, duck etc. While these articles of food were in general use, the diet of the Muslims had some notable specialities. Islam forbids the eating of pork and prescribes the sacrificing of other permitted animals in the name of Allah for using their meat as food. As indicated earlier, the Muslims of Bengal followed this injunction. This had an important social significance in that it, along with other factors, made inter-dining among Muslims and non-Muslims impracticable. It also led to a similar restriction on inter-buying or inter-selling of meat and consequently to the growth of a class of Muslim meat-sellers who acquired the appellation of *kasāis*.⁶ Of similar social significance was the Muslims' use of beef as an important and easily available item of food. Although beef used to be taken by the ancient Hindus,⁷ it later on came to be regarded as a prohibited item and ultimately the taboo crystallised into a sanctification of the animal itself. The distinction between the two communities on this count had

attached bathrooms has largely dispensed with the need for private tanks in urban areas; but a visitor to the rural areas may still observe this peculiarity.

¹ B.G., 476.

² Ma-Huan's account, V.B.A., I., 1945, 119.

³ Huang Sing-tseng's account, *ibid.*, 126.

⁴ Yen Ts'ong-kien's account, *ibid.*, 132.

⁵ Varthema and Caesar Frederick's account, quoted in J.N. Das Gupta, *op.cit.*, 115-116.

⁶ See *supra*, pp. 810, 811.

⁷ See Rājendralala Mitra, "Beef in Ancient India", *J.A.S.B.*, 1872, 174-197.

become prominent enough by 1415 so that the earliest account of that year's Chinese mission to the Bengal Sultān's court thought it worthwhile to note: "There is a clan of people called Yin-tu (Hindu) who do not eat beef..."¹ In course of time the Hindus began to take umbrage at the Muslims' taking of beef. The sixteenth century Vaishnava literature refers to Muslims as "enemies of Brahmans and cows;"² while a seventeenth century Muslim Bengali poet puts into the mouth of his hero the threat of killing cows by way of humiliating an imaginary Hindu chief.³ The ill-feeling that was developing between the two communities on the cow-question is reflected even through some popular legends regarding a few Muslim *shaikhs* recorded in the late nineteenth century. Thus, for instance, Bābā Ādam Shahīd of Rampal, Dacca, is made a victim by the legend to a Hindu chief named Ballāl Sena's wrath for the offence of sacrificing a cow.⁴

Apart from the above mentioned aspects, the Muslims' diet was also characterized by a variety of new meat and rice preparations with emphasis on spices. Preparations like *pilāu* (rice cooked with *ghee* and spices), *biriāni* (mixed rice and meat preparation), *kurmā*, *kālīā*, *koptā*, *kabāb*, etc. (all meat preparations) were introduced into Bengal by the Muslims. On special occasions and feasts different kinds of dishes were prepared. In the banquet given in honour of the Chinese ambassador in 1415 "roasted beef and mutton" were served along with "water mixed with rose juice and honey for drink" as there was a "prohibition of drinking of wine."⁵ Such a prohibition was only in consonance with the injunctions of Islam; but the Chinese accounts also mention that some kinds of wine were available in Bengal made from cocoanut, "from the nut of a tree" and from rice, and also that musicians were rewarded with wine and money after their performances.⁶ Later in the period wine is also mentioned in

¹ Fei-Sin's account (1436), *op.cit.*, 122. It is noteworthy that this account also states that the "eating of beef or mutton was forbidden" in the banquet given in honour of the Chinese ambassador. If true, it might have been due to Rājā Kāns's usurpation of power by that time.

² *Chaitanya Charitāmrita*, quoted in J.N. Das Gupta, *op.cit.*, 31.

³ Quoted in S.A. Bhuiyan, *op.cit.*, p.82.

⁴ *J.A.S.B.*, 1889, 12-18.

⁵ Fei-Sin's and Yen Ts'ong's accounts, *V.B.A.*, I.1945, 122, 131.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 119, 124, 125.

connection with special feasts organized by some Mughal officers.¹ It would appear that some from among the nobility and aristocracy proved themselves amiss in respect of this injunction of Islam. At any rate drinking of spirituous liquors did never become a general or noticeable habit with the masses. Of later rulers we know for certain that Murshid Qulī Khān and 'Alīvardī Khān themselves did never touch wine.²

Nor does tea appear to have made its appearance as a drink in Bengal during the period. One of the Chinese accounts notes: "Betel nuts take the place of tea (as with us in China)".³ In fact betel nuts with betel leaves formed the most common item for entertaining visitors and guests not only among the royalty and the nobility but also among the generality of the people. It was offered to distinguished visitors and guests in the courts of the rulers and the princes as late as the time of the Murshidabad Nawwābs.⁴ For special guests and on special occasions these were offered in special packings called *birā* (or *biri*, and also *khilī*). The translator of the *Siyar* explains one kind of *birā* as he saw it by 1786 thus: it was "composed of two or three leaves of that aromate called *Paan* by the natives, and Beetle by the English, some *Catt* or catchou, and some grains of *Ilāchi*, or Cardomoms, with a little *Supiary*, or Beetlenut, and a little *Chuna* or shell-lime; the whole folded up in a bit of those *Kela* or Plantain leaves, that are of lively green, and as shining as Satin; so as to form a Pyramid made fast with a long or clove as with a pin."⁵ But if tea had not been introduced during the period under review, coffee found its place as a favourite drink among the aristocracy at the latest by 'Alīvardī Khān's time. It is stated that he used to drink it and have it distributed among his courtiers.⁶ His nephew and second son-in-law Sa'īd Aḥmad Khān, who was governor of Purnia, used to drink coffee with his friends in the morning.⁷ Another new item introduced into Bengal during the Mughal period was

¹ B.G., 215-17.

² T.B., 113.

³ Ma-Huan's account, V.B.A., I., 1945, 119.

⁴ *Siyar*, II, 34, 36, 68, 76.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 34n (12).

⁶ *Ibid.*, 157, 159.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 134.

tobacco. It came to the south Asian subcontinent with the Portuguese and the Persians in the middle of the sixteenth century; and then it found its way into Bengal mainly in the train of the Mughal administrators and officers. Smoking of tobacco finds specific mention in connection with the Murshidabad court where *hookās*, or a special kind of pipe so fixed to a water-container as to make the smoke pass through the water, were used for the purpose.¹ But neither the drinking of coffee nor the smoking of tobacco became general among the people till the end of the period.

VI: RECREATIONS AND FESTIVITIES

One of the most favoured recreations was music. The more comfortable classes of the people enjoyed it regularly and liberally patronized musicians. The Chinese accounts mention a class of morning musicians called *Ken-siao-su-lu-nai* who used to awaken high officials and wealthy people by playing music early in the morning every day. "Every day at the stroke of five", writes the Chinese Muslim diplomat Ma-Huan, "they come around the gates of the houses of high officials and of the wealthy people blowing *so-na* (Surna - flagelots) and beating drums and then pass on to another. When comes the breakfast hour they go to each house to be rewarded with wine, food, money or other things. Besides these there are also every other kind of players."² Speaking about the same class of musicians another Chinese account adds: "One beats a small drum, another a big one and a third blows a *pi-li* (flagelot). Their music begins in a low tone but ends swiftly in a high pitch."³

Music as an art and recreation found favour more or less with all sections of the people. Poet Ālāol and a nobleman of his time named Sulaimān (17th century) were good musicians. In the riverine south and south-eastern Bengal the boatmen originated a special tune of music called *bhātiāli* which rhymed with the ebb and flow of the tides. The *bhātiāli* music found favour even at the

¹ *Ibid.*, 159.

² *V. B. A.*, I., 1945, 118.

³ *Ibid.*, 123.

Murshidabad court.¹ During the Mughal period meritorious musicians were granted lands and were encouraged to settle in Bengal.² From contemporary Bengali literature and other sources we get the names of a variety of musical instruments such as *shāh-nai*, *singā*, *bānsī* (flute), drums (*dhola*), *naqqāra* (kettle-drum), trumpets, *do-tārā* and *si-tārā* (stringed instruments). Mughal *ṣubahdārs* and governors were allowed the privilege of playing state-music on special occasions like that of a victory in war or accession of a new ruler. When 'Alīvardī Khān became victorious in his struggle for the *masnad* of Bengal and entered Murshidabad triumphantly he ordered "the music to strike".³ Such viceregal music consisted, we are told, "of two or three Nagaras, or large kettle-drums of iron, twice as big as those in Europe", two or three ordinary drums, "two or three Zoornahs or haut-boys, two or three Kerrenas, or trumpets, one or two Zills, or cymbals, an instrument lately borrowed by the Europeans from the Turks, but played by the Turks and the Persians, as well as the Indians, in a more delicate, curious and scientific manner; lastly, a very long Kerrena, or rather speaking-trumpet. It is straight, and seven or eight feet in length upon two or three inches in diameter about the mouth. It imitates exactly the voice of a tall stout man, incomparably better than the speaking-trumpets at sea, which always convey an altered disagreeable sound." There were also two or three Taasses or flat-kettles, "one, twenty inches in diameter and four in depth. One lesser, and one of one foot diameter, an ten inches in depth." All these were played either at the top of a main gate, or upon a building "raised on purpose upon three lofty arches, and called therefore *Tinpouliah*, named by the vulgar into *Tirpouliah*. All this forms a very animating music, and at a distance a pleasing one; and the long trumpet, distinctly heard a mile distance, seems to be only the voice of a Nadyr Shah, thundering out his orders to his army."⁴

¹ *Tārīkh-i-Mansūri*, J.A.S.B., 1867, 100-101.

² *Ṣubh-i-Ṣādiq*, 127b, quoted in K.M. Karim, *op.cit.*, 193.

³ *Siyar*, I, 340.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 340-41, note by the translator.

Other recreations included pick-nicking in luxury boats with all the amenities of a dwelling house,¹ hunting of wild animals like tiger, elephants and deer, and animal fights. An interesting entertainment as well as a profitable profession for some people was tiger-taming and tiger-play of which the Chinese accounts make special mention. There were people, it is recorded, "who go about the market places and to the houses with a tiger held by an iron chain. They undo the chain and the tiger lies down in the courtyard. The naked man then strikes the tiger who becomes enraged and jumps at him and he falls with the tiger. This he does several times, after which he thrusts his fist in the tiger's throat without wounding him. After this performance he chains him up again and the people of the house do not fail to feed the tiger with meat and reward the man with money. So the tiger tamer has a promising business."² It is further mentioned that the tiger-play was "much appreciated by the people".³ It is not surprising that the land which is the habitat of the finest specimen of tiger in the world⁴ should have given rise to such a manly sport. The existence of this skill of tiger-taming gives some substance to the story of a Muslim hero named Māhī-Sawār, who is stated to have appeared before a Brahman by riding upon a tiger and thus frightened him into agreeing to give his beautiful daughter in marriage with him (Māhī-Sawār), presumably after her conversion to Islam.⁵ Elephant feats and elephant fights were also a favourite recreation with the aristocratic classes throughout the period. It appears that for sometime emperor Aurangzeb prohibited elephant fights, for it is stated by the *Tawārīkh-i-Bangālāh* that engagements between elephants being prohibited from court Murshid Qulī Khān "did not allow them within his jurisdiction; but used to exhibit and be present at those between elephants and tigers, and other animals."⁶ The prohibition was however lifted

¹ B.G., 147.

² Mahuan's account, V.B.A., I., 1945, 118-119.

³ Huang Sing-t'sen's account, *ibid.*, 125.

⁴ Found in the Sundarbans and named by the British as "Royal Bengal Tiger".

⁵ Abdul Karim, *Bānglā Prāchin Puthir Bivaran*, quoted in A. Karim, *Social History etc.*, *op.cit.*, 145 n.

⁶ T.B., 113.

PLATE X.



'Alivardī Khān Hunting Near Rajmahal
Gouche, Murshidabad School, c. 1750. Preserved in the Victoria and Albert Museum,
London. By courtesy of the Trustees of the Victoria and Albert Museum.
(To face p. 820)

soon afterwards, at the latest by 'Alivardī Khān's time who, when comparatively free from warfare, used to go in the winter season to Rajmahal "where he enjoyed the pleasures of hunting the stag and the tiger (a diversion of which he was particularly fond), and after having spent his mornings in it, he amused himself with animals fighting together, such as cocks of Decan, and the elephants."¹

As regards festivals the two most important of them were, as they still are, the two 'Īds. The 'Id al-Fiṭr, observed after a month's fasting on the first day of Shawwāl, brought great rejoicings to the Muslims. The sight of the new moon was sometimes greeted with an excess of exuberance. "At the end of the day when the moon was seen at candle-light", writes Mirzā Nathan, "the imperial trumpet was blown and all the fire-arms in the artillery were continually fired. In its later part of the night, the firings of guns was stopped and its place was taken by the big cannon. It was simply an earthquake."² On this occasion all Muslims used to wear new and beautiful dresses, each according to his ability, say the prescribed prayers in big congregations at special places called 'Īd-gāhs, distributed alms and sweets to the poor, besides the *fiṭrah* (mandatory per-capita contribution for the poor and the needy), and visit and entertain friends and relatives. On the occasion of the 'Īd al-aḍḥa, celebrated on the 10th of Dhu al-Hijjah different kinds of animals were sacrificed and their meat was shared and distributed according to the law. Many people held feasts on the occasion to which friends and relatives were invited.³ Two other festivities were the *Fath-i-du-aj-daham* and *Shab-i-Barāt*. As their names suggest, they were of Iranian origin and became current earlier in the other parts of the subcontinent. They became common in Bengal, however, only during the Mughal period. The *Fath-i-du-aj-daham* (victory or celebration of the 12th *Rabī'ī*, also called 'Īd-i-Mīlād al-Nabī) was observed in commemoration of the Prophet Muhammad's (peace be on him) birth-day. Special sessions presided over by competent persons

¹ *Siyar*, II., 118.

² *B. G.*, 110.

³ *Ibid.*, 170, 742.

were held for reading *ṣalāt* on the Prophet accompanied by a narration of the history of his birth and related events together with a discussion on aspects of Islam. These were rounded up by distribution of sweets or specially prepared dishes among those present. During Murshid Qulī Khān's time the occasion was transformed into a sort of state function. The whole city of Murshidabad and the banks of the river Bhagirathi for miles, we are told, were illuminated, cannons were fired at fixed hours, and special Qur'ān reading and *ṣalāt* reciting sessions were held.¹ The *Shab-i-Barāt* (Night of assignment) was observed on the night of the 14th Sha'bān pursuant to a common but erroneous belief that Allah assigned in that night every person's lot for the coming year. But whatever the belief the night was observed with great festivity and solemnity marked, on the one hand, by works of illumination and distribution of specially prepared cakes, sweets and dishes and, on the other, by whole-night prayers and Qur'ān reading.

The *Shī'a* observance of the 10th of Muḥarram as a day of mourning for the martyrdom of Ḥusain at Karbala was introduced into Bengal during the time of the Murshidabad Nawwābs who were *Shī'as*. Although essentially a sad occasion, it was given an aspect of festivity by the types of observances organized by the *Shī'as*. Many of them of course passed the first nine days of the month in fasting and prayers; but on the 10th day a general mourning procession was brought out which had invariably some remarkable features. Besides the lamenting group of the *Shī'as* who expressed their grief in a special fashion by beating their breasts and thighs with hands with shrieks of *Hai Ḥusain* (Oh Husain!), the procession contained other attractive groups. One group carried many colourful flags, another carried or drew on wheels a highly decorated imitation grave of Ḥusain called *ta'zia*², another group displayed fireworks as the procession moved on, and a yet another group of chosen athletes exhibited various physical feats including club-manship and swordsmanship. As such these processions did not fail to attract to them a number of

¹ T.B., 110-111; See also T. Walsh, *A History of Murshidabad District*; London, 1902, 135.

² The word *Ta'zia* means mourning, but the *Shī'as* used it to mean the imitation grave.

common and uneducated *Sunnī* Muslims¹ who did so obviously for fun and diversion. To serve as the originating point for such processions, and for making and preserving the *ta'zia*, the flags and other objects including earth from Karbala and sheets from the Karbala grave, a grand *Imāmbārā* (House of the *Imām*) was built in Murshidabad by Nawwāb Sirāj al-Daulah. It was built, we are told, "with care and reverence" Muslim workmen alone "having been employed in the work, and Hindoos excluded."²

Besides these, a few essentially personal occasions like the *aqīqa* (prescribed sacrificing of animals for a newly born child) and the circumcision of a son came to be recognized as social customs when well-to-do persons held dinner parties with festivities. Another custom which came into existence was the giving of a ceremonial dinner by the relatives of a deceased person forty days after his death.³ During the time of the Murshidabad Nawwābs the new year's day (according to the Persian calendar) was observed with great festivity.⁴ Often occasions of marriage ceremonies were made into festivals by the aristocratic classes. 'Alīvardī Khān celebrated the nuptials of his two grandsons Sirāj al-Daulah and Ikrām al-Daulah with extraordinary grandeur and festivity. One thousand especially made dresses (*khil'at*) were bestowed on the occasion of Ikrām al-Daulah's marriage upon the viceroy's relations, kinsmen, friends, favourite commanders and others, and "two thousand more on occasion of Seradj-ed-doulah's nuptials; nor was any one of those below a hundred rupees; and numbers were of a thousand, and several more above that sum. Several persons of high distinctions were besides complimented with jewels according to their respective rank and station; and for a month together or more there was a continual feasting, and a continual series of entertainments at the palace of Aly-verdy-qhan, and that of his eldest nephew and son-in-law, Nevazish-mahmed-qhan, where all comers were received without exception; nor was there a family or middling or low in the city that did not partake of the festivity, by receiving several times

¹ *J. A. S. B.*, 1867, 102.

² *Tarikh-i-Mansuri*, *ibid.*, 97.

³ *Ibid.*, 102.

⁴ *Siyar*, II, 140.

tables of dressed victuals, called in India Turrahs; nor did any of those Turrahs cost less than twenty-five rupees, and some did cost a great deal more; and thousands and thousands of such prepared Turrahs or entertainments were sent all over the city to every Mussulman's house. There is no describing the illumination, feux de joyes, and the artificial fires that seemed to have set both heaven and earth in a blaze, and to have given the inhabitants of Murshidabad an idea of the Garden of Arem."¹

From the late sixteenth century onwards, more particularly during the Mughal period, we get the picture of at least a section of the wealthy people leading a life of luxury and extravagance. Dancing girls, songstresses and actresses, and wine are found forming a part of their festive life. The symptoms of degeneration are visible even among the conquering Mughal army. For instance Mirzā Nathan, while describing the celebration of the *Īd al-adha* in the Mughal camp, states that a banquet was held "throughout the whole day and night with pleasant entertainments of beautiful singers and dancers of lovely grace and story-tellers of pleasant disposition."² He also mentions that in the feast given in commemoration of his father's death wines were served and many guests got heavily drunk.³ Many of the Mughal nobles believed in magic, sorcery, witchcraft, astrology and similar other superstitions.⁴ The sixteenth century poet Vipradās speaks about an imaginary zamindar named Hasan leading a life of extraordinary luxury in the midst of numerous wives, slaves and flatterers;⁵ while the seventeenth century Muslim poet Ālāol makes reference to individual nobles being entertained by dancers and actresses.⁶ A more concrete instance is that of Sa'īd Ahmad Khān, 'Alivardī Khān's second nephew and son-in-law, who is said to have been in his youth "much addicted to amusements and pleasures". Even later on in his life when he much reformed himself, he, "instead of passing his life among dance-women and

¹ *Ibid.*, 17-18.

² *B.G.*, 170, 742; see also Manucci, IV., 235.

³ *B.G.*, 213, 215-17.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 273, 672, 758; Manrique, I., 65.

⁵ *Manasāṃgala*, 66-67, quoted in A. Rahim, *op.cit.*, 257.

⁶ Ālāol, *Toḥfā*, (ed. A. Sharif), Dacca, 1957, 166-167; and *Padmāvavati*, (ed. M. Shahidullah), Dacca, 1950, 214.

actresses, he only indulged now and then in looking or listening at their performances."¹

Indeed the degeneration of the nobility was one of the potent causes of the Muslims' loss of political power before long. It must be observed, however, that the generality of the Muslims did not succumb to such vices and lived a far cleaner and more sober life. Also, many of the innovations and superstitions were attacked with success by reformers in the nineteenth century.

¹ *Siyar*, II., 134.

CHAPTER XXXI EDUCATION AND LEARNING

By the time Muslim rule was established in Bengal education in the central Islamic lands used to be imparted chiefly through four kinds of institutions - mosque, *maktabs*, *majlises* or *ḥalqas* and *madrasas*.¹ Mosques were in fact the centres of civil life of the Muslim community, and their most important function, besides being places of worship, was as centres of learning where teaching was offered in all branches of Islamic studies, from the elementary stage to the highest level. The *imāms* in the mosques were acknowledged teachers of the community, while other scholars and learned men also attached themselves to mosques and built up their own individual centres or circles of education. *Maktabs* were intended for the removal of illiteracy and were institutions of primary education. These were also organized in mosques, but more often in separate premises, even in private houses and shops. They were concerned mainly with the teaching of the Qur'ān, the elements of arithmetic, grammar and history. *Majlises* or *ḥalqas* developed round individual scholars in response to the desire of inquisitive students for higher education in different branches of Islamic studies — *tafsīr*, *ḥadīth*, *fiqh*, jurisprudence, literature and even natural sciences. In modern terminology these centres may be called academies or seminaries. They were also held at mosques; but with the progress of time generally at private and separate premises. By the fifth century of Islam *madrasas* came into existence as parallel institutions of higher education, the most notable example being the Nizāmiya Madrasa of Baghdad, founded by Alp Arslān's *wazīr* Nizām al-Mulk in 457/1065. "The madrasah merely supplemented, but never supplanted, the mosque as an educational institution. Gradually the madrasah acquired in practice a status of 'sanctity' not much inferior to that of the mosque, and teachers and students moved freely from one to the other according to their inclination or needs."² As with the

¹ See for instance A.L. Tibawi, *Arabic and Islamic Themes*, London, 1976, 212-227 (Origin and Character of Al-Madrasah). It takes into account the other important previous works on the subject and is otherwise a very useful guide. See also his "Muslim education in the Golden age of the Caliphate", *Islamic Culture*, XXVIII,3,1954, 434 ff.

² A.L. Tibawi, *Arabic and Islamic Themes*, *op.cit.*, 223.

madrasa, mosques and other circles also were in course of time provided with living quarters and maintenance allowance for scholars. Academic activities in all these institutions were rather free and informal, in the sense that the courses of studies and their general policies were determined by their respective heads or managers, the *Mudarris*, *Mu'allim*, *Ustādh* or *Shaikh*, as the case might be, and that there was no interference in these matters by the state. Nor was there a separate department of education in the administrative system of the state although promotion of learning, which was coterminous more or less with the promotion of Islam itself, was considered as much a duty of the state as that of the individual. The machinery which seems to have been evolved was that the state, instead of directly supporting the educational institutions from the treasury, used to assign the income of *waqf* (endowed) estates for the maintenance of mosques, seminaries and *madrasas*. Individually also, the rulers, their high officials and wealthy members of the society participated in the educational activities by private charity and endowments.

I. MOSQUES AND MADRASAS

The educational system in Muslim Bengal followed the same pattern and traditions, obviously because the Muslims rulers, their nobles and others were immigrants from different parts of the central Islamic lands and brought with them similar ideas and notions. As already indicated earlier, many of the Bengal Sultāns and their officers were themselves learned men and they extended their liberal patronage to men of letters. Almost invariably the court of the Bengal Sultāns, as also the headquarters of important officers were the meeting-places of scholars and literateurs who were maintained there and were granted handsome allowances. Sometimes scholars from other countries were invited to come and settle in Bengal. The general educational needs of the community were, however, catered for by the four types of institutions mentioned above—mosques, *maktabs*, seminaries and *madrasas*. Mosques were the nerve-centres of the Muslim society in Bengal. In every important administrative centre and other places where there was a sizeable Muslim population the Sultāns and their officers, or other persons, constructed mosques. Of the

some 200 inscriptions so far discovered more than 100 relate to the construction of mosques. These inscriptions also contain verses from the Qur'ān or relevant extracts from *ḥadīth* emphasizing the merits of establishing mosques and also those of education. Many of those mosques are still in a good state of preservation. Of these the most remarkable is the Adīnā Mosque of Pandua which is the second largest mosque in the south-Asian subcontinent having a dimension of 507½ feet north to south and 285½ feet east to west.¹ Another notable instance is Khān Jahān's mosque at Bagerhat, Khulna district.² The educational purpose of the mosques is evidenced not only by literary sources but also by their constructional features. As is usual with mosques in all other places, in Bengal also they have, besides the central *miḥrāb* and payer-cum-lecture hall, facilities for ablutions and attached rooms and quarters for scholars and students.³ Their educational purpose is also clearly indicated by the fact that many of them were built at the abodes of scholars and *shaikhs*. The latter established their educational circles in and around those mosques.

Besides mosques we have specific reference to the establishment of *madrasas*. In fact this is mentioned in connection with the founder of Muslim rule in Bengal, Ikhtiyār al-Dīn Muḥammad bin Bakhtiyār Khanlī. Speaking about his achievements Minhāj states that "through his praiseworthy endeavours and those of his 'amīrs, *masjids*, *madrasahs* and *khānqahs* (seminaries) were founded in those parts."⁴ Unfortunately the historian does not give further detail about these activities, nor does he mention the exact location of the *madrasa* or *madrasas*. It can only be presumed that these were situated most likely at Lakhnawatī and its environs. Be that as it may, the next notable ruler, Ghiyāth al-Dīn 'Iwāḍ Khaljī, a principal lieutenant of the former, is stated to have "built a superb mosque, a college, and a caravansarai at Lakhnawatī" soon after his accession.⁵ He is also praised by

¹ *Infra*, pp. 888-891.

² *Infra*, p. 901.

³ *Infra*, pp. 904ff.

⁴ *Minhāj*, text, 151; tr. (Beveridge), I, 559-560. The text runs as follows:

ومساجد ومدارس و خانقاهات در آن اطراف بسعی جمیل او وامرای او بنامند -

⁵ N.N. Law, *Promotion of Learning in India during the Muhammadan Rule* (by Muhammadans), London, 1916, 106.

Minhāj for his liberal patronage of 'ulamā' and *mashāikhs* and for other benevolent deeds.¹ That Lakhnawatī should have been the site of the earliest educational activities of the Muslim rulers is natural enough, it being the seat of their government as well. And the place continued to be an important centre of learning throughout the period. There is a wide plot of land at Gaud, between Mahdipur and Fīrūzpur, which the local people still call *Darāsbāri* (College compound or Lecture Hall, or *madrassa*). It is dominated by a large mosque, also called the *Darāsbāri Masjid*. "It is 111 feet 6 inches long by 67 feet 6 inches wide, but the roof has all fallen in... The interior of the mosque was full of carved work, most of which has now disappeared. The mosque has three divisions. The central hall was 51 feet by 25 feet 6 inches and it was covered with a barrel-shaped roof. The side rooms were 42 feet broad. A verandah, 16 feet 6 inches wide, was included in this mosque on the east side."² There was also a gallery or raised platform in the north-west corner of the building. "A small projection of the gallery (18 feet by 11 feet) is still to be seen on the north side with some beautiful ornamental work."³ An inscription found under debris near the mosque records the construction of a mosque by Sultān Yūsuf Shāh in 884/1479. As the inscription is very large and heavy in weight, measuring 18' 3" × 2' 1" it has been very reasonably supposed that it could not have been removed from its original site and that it actually refers to the *Darāsbāri Masjid*. The *Darāsbāri* or *Madrassa* was either attached to the mosque or was housed in a separate structure near it, under the ruins of which the inscription has been found.⁴ An alternative suggestion has been made on the basis of another inscription of the time of Sultān 'Alā' al-Dīn Husain Shāh which specifically records the construction of a *madrassa* in 907/1502 by the Sultān's order. The inscription has been found on the enclosure of a small mosque north-west of English Bazar police station in Malda district. All the scholars who have studied the inscription are of opinion that it is not in its original place and that it might have

¹ *Minhāj*, 161; see also *supra*.

² *Memoirs*, 76-77.

³ *Ibid.*, 77.

⁴ *Ibid.*

been removed from the ruins of Gaud. One of the scholars suggests that it might have been brought from the ruins of one of the *madrasas* at that place, perhaps from the Darāsbāri or the Belbāri *madrasa*.¹ The latter refers to the remains of a large building consisting of a number of grey and black polished stone pillars at the northern end of a tank called the *Chota Sāgar Dīghī*. Though the local people now-a-days call this place the *blhitā* (mound) of Chānd Saudāgar, both General Cunnigham and 'Ābid 'Alī Khān, who have made detailed studies of the ruins of Gaud and Pandua, are of opinion that the dilapidated structure and debris represent the remains of the *Belbāri Madrasa*.²

Whether the inscription of 'Alā' al-Dīn Ḥusain Shāh referred to above actually belonged to the Darāsbāri-Belbāri *madrasa* or not, the record is in itself an independant evidence of his having established a *madrasa* either in the capital city or some other appropriate place. More significant is the information which it supplies about 'Alā' al-Dīn Ḥusain Shāh's intentions in establishing that institution. The inscription begins with the well-known *ḥadīth*: "Search after knowledge, even if it be in China," and states that the *madrasa* was established "for the teaching of the sciences of the religion and for instruction in the principles which lead to certainty."³ In other words it was an institution for higher studies in the Islamic sciences.

The same purpose and status are envisaged for another *madrasa* which was established earlier in the period at Tribeni (Sātgaon) near Hugli. It was founded in 698/1298 during the rule of Sultān Rukn al-Dīn Kaikā'us by "Qādī, the Tiger", Nāṣir Muḥammad, of whom reference has already been made previously. It is also significant that the inscription recording the

¹ Stapleton's note at *ibid.*, n. 1.

² *Ibid.*, 87.

³ *Memoirs*, 157-158; also *J.A.S.B.*, 1874, 303. The text of the inscription runs thus:

(Line 1)

قال النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم - اطلبوا العلم ولو بالصين - أمر ببناء هذه المدرسة الشريفة السلطان الأعظم الأكرم سيد السادات منيع السعادات المجاهد في سبيل المنان الفاتح للكامرو والكامته بعون الرحمن علاؤ الدنيا والدين ابو المظفر حسين شاه السلطان

(Line 2)

الحسيني خلد الله ملكه ولتدريس علوم الدين وتعليم احكام اليقين - راجيا من الله الأجر العظيم وسائلاً منه رضوانه القديم - في غرة شهر رمضان سنة سبع وتسعمائة.

establishment of the *madrasa* is carved inside a mosque known as Zafar Khān's mosque.¹ The latter (Zafar Khān) was a governor in western Bengal at that time. The inscription is in Arabic verse, and is stated to be "the oldest record of its kind in India."² It consists of 16 verses, besides a *ḥadīth* at the beginning relating to the merits of education. It is cut in raised letters around the principal *mihrāb* "built in the pillar-and-lintel style." The *ḥadīth* portion is carved on a small tablet above the lintel of the *mihrāb*, the first 12 verses on the lintel, verses 13 and 14 on the right pillar, and verses 15 and 16 on the left pillar. The *ḥadīth* states that acquisition of knowledge is submission to Allāh, its search is devotion to Him, and its discussion is His glorification (تعلموا العلم فان تعلمه طاعة وطلبه عبادة ومذاكرته تسبيح). Elsewhere in the inscription it is further stated that education constitutes a shield and protection which can avert "such evils as cannot be avoided with the help of the shield-bearer". This is obviously an allusion to the supreme need for intellectual conquest after the conquest of arms and probably has some reference to the danger of the newly established Muslim community being culturally submerged amidst the surrounding non-Muslim population and society. Speaking about the Qādī's benevolence and services to the cause of education the inscription states that he "spent large sums of money on education for the sake of the most Merciful" and provided from his "private money" subsistence allowance to men of learning, besides other facilities including carpets for their quarters. All this he did for the "teaching of the science of *sharī'at* (لتدريس علم الشرع فوق الطنافس) and for making the religion of Allāh manifest among the haughty (لإظهار دين الله بين الغطارس). The Qādī's intention was also to "enhance the greatness of the '*ulamā*' of *sharī'at* and to elevate the standards of scholars and the virtuous" (تعظيم علماء الشريعة جملة لإعلاء أعلام العلماء العباس). The record also speaks eloquently about Zafar Khān who, besides "conquering the towns of India" and destroying "the obdurate among the infidels", lavished "the treasures of his wealth in helping the miserable" and in reviving "the institutions of the

¹ E.I.M., 1917-18, 13-15.

² G. Yazdani, in *ibid.*, 13.

shari'at after their decadence". On the whole the inscription brings out three important facts. First, it shows that the Qādī and the governor of the region, Nāṣir Muḥammad and Zafar Khān respectively, both devoted themselves to the cause of education and that both of them spent their private fortunes for that purpose. Secondly the *madrasa* was established for the specific purpose of inculcating and strengthening the *sharī'at* and Islamic learning generally, and to manifest Islam (*Dīn* of Allah, دین الله) in that region. Also, it was evidently an institution of higher learning which provided for the institution of lectures (verse 1) and aimed at raising the standards of the *ulamā'* (verse 15). Thirdly, the *madrasa* was organized within the precincts of the mosque so that the commemorating record was inscribed on the lintel and pillar of its central *mihrāb*. This position of the inscription precludes any possibility of its being a subsequent fixture to the mosque, although some other records found around the place were so.

The *madrasa* founded by Qādī Nāṣir Muḥammad continued to flourish even after his death. About fifteen years afterwards, in 713/1313, Zafar Khān, who continued as governor in the region, constructed a *madrasa* at the same place.¹ As a *madrasa* was already in existence there, it has been rightly supposed that Zafar Khān "only rebuilt or extended it."² Most probably the *madrasa* organized by Qādī Nāṣir Muḥammad in the mosque itself was provided with a new building by Zafar Khān who also renamed it as *Dār al-Khairāt* (The Abode of Blessings).

II: THE ACADEMIES

Apart from the *madrasas*, and perhaps more important in their scope and influence were the academies or seminaries that grew up at a number of places, including the capital city and its environs, around distinguished scholars and savants. The growth of these academies was facilitated by the influx of a number of scholars and *shaikhs* into Bengal from different parts of the Islamic world. One of the earliest of such centres of learning was

¹ Zafar Khān's tomb inscription of the time of Fīrūz Shāh, dated 713/1313, *E.I.M.*, 1917-18, 33-34.

² G. Yazdani in *ibid.*, 34.

organized by Makhdūm Shaikh Jalāl Tabrīzī at Deotala, about 15 miles north of Pandua.¹ Originally from Tabrīz, Persia, where he received his education with Shaikh Abū Sa'īd Tabrīzī and Shaikh Shihāb al-Dīn Suhrawardī, he appears to have come to Bengal early in the 13th century A.C. As mentioned earlier, the site of his settlement and academic circle soon acquired the designation of "Tabrīzābād".² At least three subsequent rulers, Rukn al-Dīn Bārbak Shāh, Nāṣir al-Dīn Nuṣrat Shāh and Sulaimān Karrānī caused the construction of one *jāmi'* and two other mosques at Tabrīzābād.³ Shaikh Jalāl's circle had an extension at Pandua itself where a set of old buildings represented by a *jāmi'* mosque, two seminar buildings (*Chillakhānas*), a kitchen building (*Tanūr Khāna*), a storehouse (*Bhandār Khāna*), an entrance gate and a tomb of one Ḥājī Ibrāhīm still go by the name of Shaikh Jalāl's *Bari Dargāh* or 'great abode'. The architectural remains clearly indicate a big establishment with arrangements for board and lodging for scholars. The institution was supported by generous grants and endowments including one of twenty-two thousand *bighās* of landed property. The existing endowment deed clearly mentions education as one of the principal objects of the trust.⁴ This large estate, known as the *Bāis Hājāri* estate, became in subsequent times the subject of conflicting claims of which an upshot was the literary work known as *Śekh Śubhodaya*.⁵ The book purports to belong to the time of Lakshman Sena, but, as 'Ābid 'Alī Khān points out, it is clearly a spurious composition which was prepared to "establish a right to the Bāis Hājāri estates during the preparation of Todar Mall's rent-roll in Akbar's time."⁶ It is necessary to point out that *Śekh Śubhodaya* dilates on the supposed miraculous activities of Shaikh Jalāl Tabrīzī and thus rather mystifies the memory of an important historical personage.

¹ See *supra*, pp. 772-773. A useful account of his life is given in 'Abd al-Haq Dehlavi, *Akhbār al-Akhyār*, Delhi, 1332 H., 44-46.

² *Supra*, pp. 773-774.

³ See the Deotala inscriptions of the three rulers dated respectively 864/1464, 934/1528 and 978/1571, in *J.A.S.B.*, 1874, 296-97 and *Memoirs*, 170-171.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 97-106. The buildings were not constructed all at a time, but at different times by different benevolent persons.

⁵ Ed. by Sukumar Sen, Calcutta, 1927.

⁶ *Memoirs*, 105-106.

Another early and important centre of learning was at Sunārgāon, Dacca. It was established by Shaikh Sharaf al-Dīn Abū Tawwāma. Not much is known about his early life except that he was born at Bukhara and educated at Khurasan before he came to Delhi sometime during the reign of Ghiyāth al-Dīn Balban (1266-1286 A.C.). It is stated that while at Delhi his "wisdom, holiness and learning" spread in the "western region of India, nay in Arabia, Iran and other countries. He was accomplished in all the sciences, even in Chemistry, Natural Science and magic, he had experience and perfection. As for the religious sciences, the learned people used to consult him and the commons, the aristocrats, the Amirs and the Maliks, were devoted to him". It is further stated that seeing his growing influence among the people and their attachment to him, the Delhi Sultān tactfully induced him to journey to Sunārgāon. On his way he halted at Maner in Bihar where one of its leading *ulamā'*, Shaikh Sharaf al-Dīn Yaḥyā Manerī, paid him a visit and being impressed by his learning and accomplishments accompanied him to Sunārgāon for acquiring more knowledge about the religious sciences.¹ Abū Tawwāma arrived at Sunārgāon most probably early in the eighties of the 13th century A.C.² and soon succeeded in building up there an important academy of learning where people from far and near came for higher studies in different branches of Islamic learning. Here Shaikh Sharaf al-Dīn Yaḥyā Manerī is stated to have studied *tafsīr*, *ḥadīth*, jurisprudence and other subjects in each of which he attained recognized proficiency. Subsequently he married Abū Tawwāma's daughter and returned to Maner where he established a similar institution of learning.

Abū Tawwāma lies buried near his academy at Sunārgāon.

¹ S.H. al-Ma'sūmī, "Sunārgāon in learning", *Islamic Culture*, XXVII, I, January, 1953, 1-12, quoting *Manāqib al-'Aṣṭiyya* of Shāh Shu'aib, an almost contemporary work written by Sharaf al-Dīn Yaḥyā Manerī's nephew.

² Dr. M. Isahaq, (*India's contribution to the Study of Hadith Literature*, Dacca University, 1955, 53) states on the basis of a rather modern work named *Nuzhat al-Khawātir* that Abū Tawwāma came to Sunārgāon during the reign of Iltutmish (1210-1236 A.C.); while Dr. S.H. al-Ma'sūmī (*op.cit.*, 10) states, on the basis of *Manāqib al-'Aṣṭiyya* of Shāh Shu'aib that the scholar came to Sunārgāon in 669/1271. Dr. A. Karim (*Social History etc.*, 67-72) discusses these views and states on the ground of the probable date of the inclusion of eastern Bengal in the Muslim Bengal dominion that Abū Tawwāma arrived at Sunārgāon most probably between 1282 and 1287.

The institution founded by him continued to be a great centre of learning for long after his death. At times it even proved to be the asylum or place of banishment for persecuted or unwanted intellectuals and scholars whom the rulers wanted to get away from near the capital. That particularly was the case with the celebrated Pandua Shaikh 'Alā' al-Ḥaḡ who was for sometime banished from Pandua by the then reigning Sulṭān Sikandar Shāh. After two years of sojourn there 'Alā' al-Ḥaḡ returned to Pandua. Subsequently his grandsons Shaikh Anwar and Shaikh Rafī' al-Dīn, and the latter's son Shaikh Zāhid, were likewise banished to the Sunārgāon seminary by the usurper Rājā Kāns who ultimately tortured Shaikh Zāhid to death. The Sunārgāon seminary continued to exist with the vicissitudes of time till almost the end of the period. During the reign of Sulṭān Nāṣir al-Dīn Nuṣrat Shāh a mosque and a pond were constructed there in 929/1523 by one of his officers, Taqī al-Dīn, (son of 'Ain al-Dīn) who, as indicated previously, is described in the record as "the chief of the lawyers and teachers of *ḥadith* (قدوة الفقهاء والمحدثين)".¹ Most probably he was in some way connected with the Sunārgāon seminary.

Another centre of education which came into being early in the Muslim period was at Gangarampur, Dinajpur, at the instance of Shaikh 'Aṭā' who, as noted earlier, was also the leader of a Muslim settlement there.² The centre received the attention and patronage of a number of subsequent rulers. Thus Sulṭān Sikandar Shāh, son of Ilyās Shāh, erected a domed structure there in 765/1363, when Shaikh 'Aṭā' was already dead.³ In 887/1482 Sulṭān Jalāl al-Dīn Fath Shāh reconstructed a stone building there,⁴ which was obviously one of the structures connected with the institution. About nine years afterwards, in 896/1491, Sulṭān Shams al-Dīn Muẓaffar Shāh constructed a mosque at the place;⁵ and, finally, Sulṭān 'Alā' al-Dīn Ḥusain Shāh constructed another

¹ Sunārgāon inscription of Nuṣrat Shāh, *J.A.S.B.*, 1872, 337-338.

² *Supra*, pp. 777-778.

³ Devikot inscription of Sikandar Shāh, dated 765/1363, *E.I.M.*, 1929-30, 10-11.

⁴ Rajshahi Museum inscription of Fath Shāh, dated 887/1482, Dani, *Bibliography*, No. 55.

⁵ Gangarampur inscription of Muẓaffar Shāh, dated 896/1491, *E.I.M.*, 1929-30, 11-12.

mosque and minaret there in 918/1512.¹ In all these inscriptions respectful mention is made of Shaikh 'Aṭā who is described as *Shaikh al-Mashāikh*, *Qutb al-Auliā*, *Sirāj al-Haq wa al-Shar' wa al-Dīn*, etc.

Parallel to, and in some ways outshining these was the seminary organized at Pandua by Shaikh 'Alā' al-Haq. He claimed descent from Khālīd ibn al-Walīd, and his father was in charge of the treasury of Sulṭān Sikandar Shāh (1357-1392 A.C.). One of his sons, A'zam Khān, was also a *wazīr* at the Pandua court. Despite such high connections 'Alā' al-Haq was never inclined to official situation and he devoted himself wholly to the promotion of education and other cultural pursuits. He and his family appear to have come to Bengal along with the rise of the Ilyās Shāhīs. By the time of Sikandar Shāh 'Alā' al-Haq had already made his mark as the leader of an intellectual group who were not quite liked by that ruler who, as indicated already, had him banished to Sunārgāon for some time. After his return from that place, however, 'Alā' al-Haq started work on his educational establishment with renewed vigour. His centre was provided with a large boarding house for scholars. Subsequently a hospital was also attached to it. Of those who received their education at the Pandua academy under 'Alā' al-Haq and became famous in their lives were, besides his illustrious son and successor Shaikh Nūr Qutb al-'Ālam, Mīr Sayyid Ashraf Jahāngīr Simnānī, who came from Central Asia, Shaikh Nāṣir al-Dīn of Manikpur, U.P., India, and Shaikh Husain Dhukarposh of Purnia. Mīr Sayyid Ashraf Jahāngīr Simnānī subsequently betook himself to Jaunpur and organized a seminary there. After 'Alā' al-Haq's death, most probably in 800/1398, his son Shaikh Nūr Qutb al-'Ālam continued the work of his father. As leader of the Pandua seminary Nūr Qutb al-'Ālam became even more famous than his father. His time coincided with the troublous period of Rājā Kāns's usurpation. It was the '*ulamā*' of the Pandua seminary under Nūr Qutb al-'Ālam, supported also by the group of Jahāngīr Simnānī at Jaunpur, who successfully opposed Kāns's

¹ Deokot inscription of 'Alā' al-Dīn Hussain Shāh, dated 918/1512, *ibid.*, 12-13.

oppressive policies, brought about the intervention of the Jaunpur Sultān and ultimately caused a restoration of Muslim rule in Bengal.¹ Among Nūr Quṭb al-‘Ālam’s notable students who received education at the Pandua academy were Shaikh Kāku of Lahore (died 1416 A.C.), Husām al-Dīn of Manikpr. (U.P., died 1477 A.C.) and Shams al-Dīn of Ajmer (died 1476). The Pandua seminary continued to be run after Nūr Quṭb al-‘Ālam’s death by his successors and received many a subsequent ruler’s patronage and endowments. Sultān Nāṣir al-Dīn Maḥmūd Shāh, for instance, had a mosque built there in 896/1490-91;² Sultān ‘Alā’ al-Dīn Husain Shāh made an endowment of 42 villages for the support of the seminary and hospital there;³ and Prince Shāh Shujā’, son of the Mughal emperor Shāh Jahān, made a fresh grant of lands to the institution.⁴

Another important educational centre was at Bāghā, Rajshahi. It was established by Shāh Mu‘azzam Dānishmand, popularly known as Shāh Daulah,⁵ during the time of Sultān Nāṣir al-Dīn Nuṣrat Shāh. The latter constructed a *jāmi*’ mosque there in 930/1524. Shāh Daulah’s seminary was based on this mosque. When ‘Abd al-Latīf, a Mughal officer, visited the place in 1609, he found a flourishing *madrasa* there run by an eminent scholar aged 100 years and popularly known as Hawadah Miyān.⁶ He was most probably Shāh Daulah’s son Hāmid Dānishmand.⁷ When Prince Shāh Jahān temporarily held Bengal as a rebel against his father in 1622, he passed through this place and being impressed by the educational establishment there made an endowment of 42 villages to ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, son of Hāmid Dānishmand.⁸ Thus the institution continued to flourish through generations. Even after about one hundred years of British rule Bāghā was found to be an important centre of what was called “Persian education.”

¹ *Supra*, p. 153.

² Hadrat Pandua inscription of Maḥmūd Shāh-II, dated 23 Rabi’ I., 896/1490-91, *J.A.S.B.*, 1873, 289.

³ *Memoirs*, 113, also *Ṭabaqāt*, III, 270-71.

⁴ *Memoirs*, 113.

⁵ *Supra*, pp. 780-781.

⁶ ‘Abd al-Latīf’s account, reproduced and translated by J.N. Sarkar in *B.P.P.*, 1928, Part II, 143.

⁷ See *supra*, p. 781.

⁸ *J.A.S.B.*, 1904, No. 2, 112.

William Adam, who submitted his well-known education report to government in the mid-thirties of the nineteenth century, wrote: "The *madrasah* at Kushbah Bagha is an endowed institution of long-standing. The property appears to have originally consisted of two portions, which are stated to have been bestowed by two separate royal grants. A *sanad* of the 19th year of Shah Jahan confirms the grant of land to the *madrasah* made previously as *madad-i-ma'āsh* and Shaikh 'Abd al-Wahhāb, to whom the *sanad* of Shahjahan was granted, was given the title of Maulana, a title bestowed on men of great learning."¹ This shows that the grant made by Shāh Jahān as a rebel prince was subsequently confirmed by him when he was emperor of Delhi.

The *madrasas* and academies were institutions of higher education. Different branches of the Islamic sciences, *tafsīr*, *hadīth*, jurisprudence, *fiqh*, natural sciences, mathematics, medicine, intensive courses in Arabic and Persian literature and grammar, etc., were taught in these institutions. Works of Euclid on geometry, and of Ptolemy on astronomy, in translations, and those of Ibn Sīnā and Ibn Rushd on medicine were used as textbooks.² Besides these, important *tafsīrs* of the Qur'ān and collections of *hadīth* like those of Bukhārī and Muslim, etc. were necessarily used in those seminaries and *madrasas*.³ These higher educational institutions were maintained by a rather extensive system of private and state endowments. The Sultāns, their nobles and officers, and other wealthy persons made large grants of rent-free landed estates for mosques, *madrasas* and other centres of learning. Hundreds of such rent-free landed estates were in existence in Bengal even as late as the first half of the nineteenth century when most of them were resumed by the British Indian government. Indeed the department of endowments and religious affairs which, under the Delhi rulers, was in charge of a minister called *Ṣadr-i-Ṣudūr*, seems to have taken the place of the department of education in the administration. Though the extant

¹ Adam's *Reports on Vernacular Education etc.*, Calcutta, 1868, 161.

² *Ibid.*, 20-21.

³ Even now-a-days these are the works which are mainly studied at the *madrasas* though they are, because of the emergence of modern universities, somewhat divested of their character as higher educational institutions.

records of the Bengal Sultānat do not give us the name of any *Ṣadr-i-Sudūr*, some such official or minister must have been there to look after the financial and other multifarious matters connected with the numerous endowments and mosques established at the instance and behest of the government. It is worth emphasizing once again that most of the academies and centres of learning were based on or associated with mosques so much so that the late nineteenth century British India government's education commissioners were led on to observe that there was not a mosque in the country "in which professors of Arabic and Persian were not maintained."¹ It has already been indicated that the British Indian authorities preferred the expression "Arabic and Persian" to "Islamic studies".

The *shaikhs* and '*ulamā*' who established and worked at these educational institutions and who lie buried at or near the sites of their activities have through the passage of time been made the objects of many pious legends and curious popular tales. In the late nineteenth century some British scholars like H. Blochmann took pains to collect those legends as also the available records (inscriptions). They were so much impressed by those legends that they uniformly described those *shaikhs* and educationists, or even the administrators like Zafar Khān, as "saints". And apparently influenced by the writings of these European scholars a few modern Muslim scholars of the south-Asian subcontinent have also depicted those educationists and *ulamā*' as "saints", often emphasizing their supposed miraculous character. Needless to say that there is no "sainthood" in Islam and that the *shaikhs* and educationists under reference were far from being legendary and miraculous figures. Sometimes the word "saint" has been used by these modern scholars interchangeably with *ṣūfīs*. It may be pointed out that some of the *shaikhs* and scholars had no doubt *ṣūfī* leanings; but whatever the nature of their *ṣūfism* they were not in the least diverted from the *sharī'a*. In fact they were first and foremost champions of the *Sharī'a* and teachers of Qur'ān and *ḥadīth*, and it is as such that they are described in the inscriptions

¹ Education Commission, *Bengal Provincial Committee*, 1886, Part II, para. 183.

wherein they are invariably called *Shaikh*, '*Allāma*, *Ustādh*, *Nūr al-Haq wa al-Dīn wa al-Shar'* etc. It is also noteworthy that they built up their centres and academies at or around mosques, and that their objects, as recorded in the inscriptions, is invariably stated to be the inculcation of the law of the *sharī'a* and the principles of the *Dīn* (*Aḥkām al-Dīn*, i.e., Islam). Far from being recluses, they were very much part and parcel of the society, living with and among the people, taking part in the day-to-day affairs of life, and at times even in matters of state, thus doing their utmost to cater to the social, intellectual and cultural needs of the people.

III: PRIMARY EDUCATION

For primary education there were *maktabs* in every locality and village where there was a sizeable Muslim population. These also were established either by wealthy individuals interested in education or by joint efforts of the inhabitants of a place. A good many of them were also supported by state endowments. In fact primary education was an immediate concern of the Muslim society; for every Muslim regarded it his religious duty to educate his children. Like the institutions of higher education, *maktabs* also originated with the mosque and were often attached with it. Generally, however, these were organized in separate premises. Contemporary Bengali literature as well as early nineteenth century reports amply testify to the widespread existence of *maktabs* in the country and their useful functions as institutions of primary education. Thus, for instance, the sixteenth century poet Mukundarām, while giving an account of the daily life of a Muslim settlement states; "*Maktabs* were also set up where Muslim children were taught by *Makhdūms* (teachers)".¹ *Maktabs* sprang up, observed the education commission of 1885, wherever the Muslims "predominated in numbers".² Speaking about the *maktabs* in the Birbhum district William Adam wrote in 1838³ that endowments formed the most common source of

¹ Mukundarām, *Chandikāvya*, quoted in J.N. Das Gupta, *op.cit.*, 90-91.

² *Report of the Bengal Provincial Committee of the Education Commission*, Calcutta, 1886, Part II., para. 183.

³ Adam's *Third Report*, 66; also *Second Report*, 28.

support for those institutions. Another government survey in the early seventies of the nineteenth century revealed that a large number of educational institutions, higher and elementary, were supported by rent-free endowed lands.¹ Apart from the *maktabs* there was also a system of domestic education. Wealthy persons used to maintain teachers in their houses for the tuition of their own children as well as those of their poor neighbours who could not afford to maintain such private teachers or pay for their education. Willim Adam noted in 1835 that in the vicinity of Pandua it was the practice of Muslim landed proprietors "to entertain teachers at their own private cost for the benefit of the children of the poor in their neighbourhood, and it was a rare thing to find an opulent farmer or head of a village who had not a teacher in his employ for that purpose."² It may be observed that such was the case in almost every Muslim locality. Further, it is also worth remembering that Adam and the other British observers thus noted the situation only when the decline and degeneration of the Muslims were complete. The picture was understandably far brighter in the days of their prosperity and rule. There were also special *maktabs* or institutions specifically for memorizing the Qur'ān.

Usually the education of a child started at the age of four to five, and he studied in the *maktab* form five or six years. There he was taught, above all things, to read the Qur'ān and learn the rules and principles relating to ablution, prayer, fasting, *hajj*, *zakāt*, and other observances. He was also taught the elements of the Arabic and Persian languages, together with basic courses in their grammars, in addition to arithmetic, history and other ancillary subjects. Special emphasis was laid on the reading and writing of Persian which was the language of administration and culture; and care was taken to see that a student acquired at least working knowledge in that language. It was also learnt with equal avidity by the Hindus whose children also attended the *maktabs*. Later in the period Bengali also was added in the course of studies; and it

¹ *Selections from the Records of the Government of India*, No. CCV, 241. See also *Bengal Educational Endowments Committee Report*, Calcutta, 1888.

² *Adama's First Report*, 55.

appears that a student had to learn, even in the primary stage, elements of the three languages, with tolerable knowledge at least in two. In course of time *maktabs* appear to have been classified into two categories—the ones with more emphasis on the study of the Qur'ān and Muslim religious observances, and the others with emphasis on Persian and other subjects. At least that is what would appear from the reports of Adam who terms them respectively as Arabic and Persian schools. Yet, the attendance in both of them were rather mixed. According to Adam himself, of the some 193 Arabic and Persian schools which he was able to trace in the districts of Murshidabad, Burdwan and Birbhum, there were a total of 786 Muslim boys and 784 Hindu boys¹ in them.

¹ See Adam's *Third Report*, 17,24,30,33.

CHAPTER XXXII

LITERARY ACTIVITIES

WORKS IN ARABIC AND PERSIAN

Literary activities went hand in hand with educational efforts and, in common with the latter, owed much to the patronage of the rulers and their nobles. These activities may be classified into two categories: (a) works in Arabic and Persian and (b) development of the Bengali language and literature.

Persian, and to some extent Arabic, were the languages of the Muslim rulers and others who came with them and settled in Bengal. Arabic is the language of the Qur'ān and *hadīth*; and all the higher branches of Islamic learning were available only through that language. It was natural therefore that the Muslims in Bengal would continue to use their own language in administration, education and literary activities. From the very beginning Persian was adopted as the official language. There were however three special factors which facilitated its use and cultivation in Bengal. In the first place, when the Muslims came to Bengal both Arabic and Persian had attained a high degree of literary perfection and had become the two leading international languages of the time. Correspondingly, there was no local or vernacular literature worth the name in the whole of the south Asian subcontinent, not to speak of Bengal alone. Sanskrit was of course a developed language, but its use and study were confined to the priestly Brahman class who, far from popularizing it, religiously debarred the vast majority of the people of the land from its study or even from touching the "sacred books" written in that language—a fact which at least partly explains the existence of more than two hundred local and different languages among the people even after two thousand years of Brahmanical predominance.¹ Therefore, even if the Muslim rulers wished it, it would have been very difficult for them to readily find a local substitute for Persian as the language of administration. Secondly, along with the warriors and rulers there came a whole host of scholars, educationists and

¹ The *Census Report* of 1911 recorded 211 living languages in British India.

men of literature. As already indicated, it was these men who had in fact taken the lead in establishing educational institutions in different parts of the country; and it was also these men who undertook literary activities in Persian and Arabic in Bengal, at least for the initial period. Thirdly, it was a well-established tradition with the Muslims that wherever they went and established their sway they attempted to grasp its intellectual heritage by having anything of literary or academic merit found there translated into their own language. The same tradition was also followed in Bengal.

The earliest specific instance of Persian literary work in Bengal amply confirms the two last mentioned points. It was a work by an eminent immigrant Muslim scholar and was at the same time a translation of a Sanskrit work named *Amritkunda*. The work was presented to Qādī Rukn al-Dīn al-Samarqandī, the Qādī of Lakhnawatī during 'Alī Mardān Khaljī's rule (607-610/1210-1213) by one Bhojār Brahman of Kāmṛūp (Assam). The Brahman embraced Islam after an intense religious discussion with the Qādī, while the latter had the book translated into Persian and Arabic.¹ Qādī Rukn al-Dīn al-Samarqandī has been identified with the distinguished *Ḥanafī* jurist of Bukhāra, Qādī Rukn al-Dīn Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad bin Muḥammad al-Amādī of Samarqand; and as the latter is known to have died at Bukhāra in 615/1218-19, it has been supposed that he returned to his native land after having served for some years in Bengal.² The work (*Amritkunda*) appears to have aroused much interest among the Muslim academic circles, for besides Qādī Rukn al-Dīn, other scholars subsequently translated it into Arabic and Persian;³ and though the original Sanskrit work has not yet come to light, several manuscripts of its Arabic and Persian translations exist in a number of libraries in India, Europe and north Africa (Cairo).

¹ See *J.P.H.S.*, I., 1953, Part I., 46-55.

² *Ibid.*, 50-51.

³ One of the Persian versions entitled *Bahr al-Ḥayāt* has been ascribed to Shaikh Muḥammad Ghauthī of Gwalior, India, who died in 1562; and an Arabic version has been ascribed to the famous Damascus scholar Ibn al-'Arabī. The Arabic work is variously entitled as *Ḥawḍ al-Ḥayāt* or كتاب مرآت المعاني في ادراك العلم الإنساني. The full Arabic version is published in *Journal Asiatique*, Tome CCXIII, 292-344.

Whether any other similar Sanskrit work was taken up for translation is not known, nor do we come across any further Persian literary composition in Bengal till the closing years of the 7th/13th century though it would be difficult to think that literary activities were totally in abeyance during the intervening period. Towards the end of the century, however, there was another influx of scholars and educationists, the most distinguished of whom was Shaikh Sharaf al-Dīn Abū Tawwāma, founder of the Sunārgāon academy. There soon came into existence a group of writers from among his students. A few specimens and titles of these works have come down to us. These show that by that time the Muslim scholars had taken to independent compositions instead of translations to meet the various educational and religious needs of the society. Abū Tawwāma himself was a powerful writer. One of his works entitled *Maqāmat*, dealing with metaphysical subjects, gained much popularity and was sought after by the learned throughout India.¹ Unfortunately it is not known to exist now. Another book on *fiqh* in Persian called *Nām-i-Ḥaḡ* was either composed by him or by one of his students.² Written most probably in 693/1293³ it is divided into 10 chapters dealing with the various rules regarding *waḍu* (ablution), *ghusl* (bath), *tayammum* (purification by soil, water being non-available), *ṣalāt* (prayer) and *ṣawm* (fasting). It was intended, as the author states, for general readers who could not find much time to study such subjects in detail. The most distinguished scholar-writer of the Abū Tawwāma school was the latter's student and son-in-law Shaikh Sharaf al-Dīn Yaḥyā Manerī. At least a dozen of his works entitled *Fawā'id-i-Ruknī*, *Irshād al-Ṭālibīn*, *Ma'dan al-Ma'ānī*, *Risālat al-Makkiyah*, *Aqā'id-i-Ashrāfī*, etc., and dealing with *ṣūf*-ism and related subjects, have come to light.⁴ More than three hundred of his letters written to different Shaikhs, Qāḍīs and Sul-

¹ J.A.S.B., 1923, 274, 277.

² See for a discussion about the authorship of the work S.H. al-Ma'sūmī, *op.cit.*, 11-12; and A. Karim, *op.cit.*, 73-74.

³ The author's dating is rather unusual. He says that the book was completed 693 years after the death of the Prophet. Most probably the *Hijrī* era was intended. The book has been subsequently printed from Kanpur, India, in 1332 H.

⁴ See the *Calcutta Review*, 1939, 313, for a full list.

tāns have also been discovered and recently published under such titles as *Maktūbāt-i-Ṣadī* (One hundred letters), *Maktūbāt-i-Du-Ṣadī* (150 letters) and *Bist wa Hasht*.¹ Another scholar of the same group, but a little later in point of time, was Ibrāhīm Qawwām Fārūqī. He prepared a Persian Lexicon named *Farhang-i-Ibrāhīmī* most probably during the time of Sulṭān Bārbak Shāh (864—879/1459—1447). It is more commonly known as *Sharafnāma* because it was dedicated to the memory of Sharaf al-Dīn Yaḥyā Manerī.² Unfortunately no further details about Ibrāhīm Qawwām Fārūqī are available. His *Sharafnāma* mentions, however, the names of some other scholars and poets who flourished about that time. One of the poets, Amīr Zain al-Dīn Harwī, is called the Poet-laureate (ملك الشعراء); while another scholar, Amīr Shihāb al-Dīn Ḥakīm, is called the “pride of physicians (افتخار الحكماء). The latter was the author of another Persian lexicon entitled *Frahang-i-Amīr Shihāb al-Dīn Ḥakīm Kirmānī*. Ibrāhīm Qawwām Fārūqī occasionally quotes from this latter work. Another scholar was Shaikh Wāḥedī, who was the author of a work named *Ḥabl al-Matīn*. The subject-matter of this work is not however mentioned. Five other poets are mentioned. They were Maṣṣūr Shīrāzī, Malīk Yūsuf bin Ḥāmid, Sayyid Jalāl, Sayyid Muḥammad Rukn and Sayyid Ḥasā.³ Unfortunately none of their works seems to survive today.

Other scholars and poets arrived at Lakhnawatī towards the end of the thirteenth century, especially in the train of Prince Nāṣir al-Dīn Bughra Khān who was appointed governor of Bengal in 1283 (682 H.) by his father, the Delhi Sulṭān Ghiyāth al-Dīn Balban. Two of those who came with Bughra Khān to Bengal were Qādī Athīr, a great scholar, and Shams al-Dīn Dabīr, a poet of high rank. The latter had been previously adorned with the title of *Malik al-Kalām* (Lord of Eloquence). It is also said that the famous Delhi poet Amīr Khusrau used to show his compositions to Dabīr and accept his views on them. Balban appointed

¹ *Ibid.*; also *Islamic Culture*, 1953, 12. The *Maktubat-i-Ṣadī* was published from Bihar Sharif, India, in 1286 H.

² According to Dr. A. Karim a manuscript of the work exists in the 'Aliya Madrasah Library, Dacca, No. P. MSS/13-18.

³ *Ibid.*, folios 23, 43, 49, 60, 185, 231 and 241, quoted by A. Karim, *op.cit.*, 79.

Dabīr as Bughra Khān's secretary in Bengal where the poet settled.¹ None of Dabīr's works has come to light, however. Another contemporary writer was Kāmil-i-Karīm who wrote at least an Arabic book on *Fiqh* entitled *Majmū'-i-Khānī Fi 'Ain al-Ma'ānī*.² It was dedicated to Bahram Khān alias Tātār Khān, the Delhi Sulṭān Ghiyāth al-Dīn Tughlaq's and Muḥammad Tughlaq's governor first at Lakhnawatī and then at Sunārgāon between 725/1326 and 738/1337. The very fact that at least two Persian lexicons and two *Fiqh* books, one in Persian and the other in Arabic, were prepared shows that by the turn of the century Persian had come to be widely used in official and non-official circles and as the medium of instruction in the *madrasas* and academies.

The Ilyās Shāhī Sulṭāns who next took over in Bengal in the middle of the fourteenth century were great patrons of learning and literature. Sulṭān Ghiyāth al-Dīn A'zam Shāh (792-813/1390-1410) of this dynasty was himself a poet of no small merit and used to compose verses in both Arabic and Persian. The story of his having requested the famous Persian poet Ḥāfiz to help him in completing a Persian couplet and also of having invited him to visit Bengal has been alluded to earlier.³ More important than this, during the Ilyās Shāhī period there came into existence in Bengal, partly because of new arrivals from other countries and partly because of the spread of Islamic education, a large and influential group of '*ulamā*' and scholars headed by Shaikh 'Alā' al-Ḥaq and his son Shaikh Nūr Quṭb al-'Ālam. They contributed much to the intellectual and literary activities of the time. Nūr Quṭb al-'Ālam was a great scholar and writer. One of his works was a commentary and translation of a collection of *ḥadīth* entitled *Anīs al-Ghurabā*. A number of his letters written to different personalities have recently been brought to light.⁴ These reveal his profound scholarship and command of Persian. Some of his poems also have been discovered and published.⁵

¹ Badāyūnī, *Muntakhab*, I., 94-96, 154-155.

² Asiatic Society of Bengal Library, Calcutta, MSS Curzon Collection.

³ *Supra*, p. 145.

⁴ S.H. Askari in *B.P.P.*, 1948, No. 130, 38-39.

⁵ M. Husam, *East Bengal Culture*, 12, quoted in A. Rahim, *op.cit.*, 170.

By the end of the Ilyās Shāhī period Persian had been well-established as the official and literary language and had attained the status of a lingua-franca so that the Husain Shāhīs, though they were Arabs in origin, did not think of replacing it by Arabic as the official language. The rulers of this dynasty are even more noted for their patronage of literature, especially of Bengali literature. During 'Alā' al-Dīn Husain Shāh's reign (899-925/1493-1519) a qualified *Muḥaddith* (one qualified in *ḥadīth*) named Muḥammad bin Yazdān transcribed the famous *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* in three volumes at Ekdala, then the capital of the Sultān.¹ Another writer, Muḥammad Buda'ī alias Sayyid Mīr 'Alwī, who was apparently specialised in military sciences, wrote a book on archery entitled *Hedāyat al-Rāmī*, illustrating it with various drawings.² It was dedicated to Husain Shāh. There must have been other writings during the period, though these have not come down to us.

With the establishment of Mughal authority in Bengal the cultivation of Persian language entered a new phase. Under the Mughals and the *Nawwābs* Bengal enjoyed political stability continually for a century and a half making it possible for a steady development of art and literature. A new and a very large set of scholars and writers came and settled in Bengal during this period. Many of the Mughal viceroys, officials and generals, somewhat in line with the Mughal princes and princesses, were prolific writers. The Mughal administrative system also contributed in a way to literary activities. It was the practice to appoint *Wāqia'-Nawīs* (official news-writers) and calligraphists (copyists) along with the viceroys in the provinces. Some of these officials turned out to be good historians and literateurs. Even the Mughal conquering army were accompanied by "musicians, singers, story-tellers, poets and readers of books" who, we are told, used to hold assemblies "every day and night,"³ obviously when they had no fighting to do. The claim is amply justified by the writer himself,

¹ *Catalogue of the Arabic and Persian manuscripts in the Oriental Public Library at Bankipore*, Vol. V., Part I., Nos. 130-132.

² Charles Rieu, *Catalogue of Persian manuscripts in the British Museum*, II, London, 1881, p. 489, No. Add. 26,306.

³ *B.G.*, II., 686.

'Alā' al-Dīn Isfahānī alias Mirzā Nathan who, as noted earlier, was a military officer accompanying Islām Khān's expedition to Bengal. Mirzā Nathan's *Bahāristān-i-Ghaibī* is a literary piece of high standard, besides being an authentic history of the Mughal campaigns in Bengal and Assam during Jahāngīr's time. Mirzā Nathan also refers to other soldier-writers from among his colleagues. One Maulānā Luqmān, a poet, is stated to have composed two *Jangnāmas* (battle-accounts), one versifying the important Mughal victory at Dākcharā and on the Lakhya over Mūsā Khān, and the other on the suppression of a rebel officer named 'Alī Akbar. Another soldier-poet and scholar, Maulānā Mīr Qāsim, composed a *Jangnāma* on the Mughal victory over the Afghan leader 'Uthmān; while another writer, Malik Mubārak, wrote two other *Jangnāmas* describing the victory over Bāyazīd in Sylhet and the conquest of Kuch Bihar.¹ These *Jangnāmas* have not however come to light. Early in the seventeenth century when the Mughals were still fighting the Afghans in Bengal, 'Abd al-Laṭīf, an attendant of the Mughal *dīwān* Abū al-Ḥasan, wrote a Persian diary of his travels through a number of districts and captioned it *Haft Iqlīm* (written about 1608). It throws valuable light on social and cultural life in Bengal at that time.

The initial period of conquests and pacification being over, the reign of Shāh Jahān witnessed unprecedented peace and prosperity throughout the Mughal dominions, and this was well reflected in Bengal too. One of the Mughal officers of the time, Muḥammad Ṣādiq, who was posted at Dacca along with his father between the years 1628 and 1638 (1038-1048 H.) has left for us not only a good piece of literature but also an account of the cultural and intellectual life of Dacca (Jahāngīrnagar) at that time. It was at Dacca that Ṣādiq wrote his rather encyclopaedic work, the *Ṣubḥ-i-Ṣādiq*, in four volumes. It is a compendium of universal history and geography, together with personal reminiscences. The third volume of the work is devoted to a description of the Mughal state upto the seventh year of Shāh Jahān's reign. It is a

¹ *Ibid.*, I., 70, 85, 96, 206, 208, 253.

considerable literary work which in a way takes up the thread of the narrative from the point where it was left by Mirzā Nathan's *Bahāristān-i-Ghaibī*.¹ Ṣādiq wrote another work called *Shahīd-i-Ṣādiq*, but details about it are not available. The *Ṣubḥ-i-Ṣādiq* mentions a number of other scholars and writers who lived at Dacca and enriched its cultural life. One of them was Mīr 'Alā' al-Ḥaqq who is described as an embodiment of all learning - the sciences, *ḥadīth*, *fiqh*, medicine and mathematics. He wrote a number of books of which one on logic entitled *Muḥaddab*, and two others on religious subjects entitled *Anwar al-Hidāya* and *Ṣirāt al-Wasīṭ* were the most important. His brother, Mīr Abū al-Ma'ālī, was an equally learned man and gifted writer whose literary works included a commentary (*tafsīr*) on *Surat al-Ikhlās*, an anthology of poems, a memoir of his illustrious brother, and a work on justice ('*adālat*) entitled *Al-Mu'azzam al-'Ulūm*. Some other poets mentioned by Ṣādiq were 'Abd al-Raḥīm alias Haidarī, Khwāja Sa'īd al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Mashhadī, Muḥammad Ḥusain Manerī Ghaffārī, Nadīm Jilānī and Aḥmad Beg Isfahānī.² Towards the end of Shāh Jahān's reign his son Prince Shujā' was the viceroy in Bengal. A good number of Persian scholars flourished under his patronage. One of them, Mīr Muḥammad Ma'sūm, wrote the *Tarīkh-i-Shāh Shujā'* (History of Shāh Shujā', also called *Tarīkh-i-Ma'sūmī*) which was completed in 1660.³ During the succeeding viceroyalty of Mīr Jumla his *Wāqi'a-Nawīs* Shīhab al-Dīn Tālīsh compiled a valuable historical account of the viceroy's campaigns in Assam together with notices of its social and economic life entitled *Tarīkh-i-Mulk-i-Assam* or *Fathīya-i-Ibriya*.⁴

The establishment of an almost independent *nizāmat* in Bengal by Aurangzeb's last viceroy, Murshid Qulī Khān, early in the 18th century paved the way for another large influx of learned

¹ The most appropriate sections of the *Ṣubḥ-i-Ṣādiq* dealing with the intellectual life in Bengal at that time have been translated and published by the late Professor A. Halim under caption: "An account of celebrities of Bengal of the early years of Shāh Jahān's reign", *J.P.H.S.*, I., October, 1953, 339-356.

² *Ibid.*, 348-352.

³ I.O.L. Pers. MSS. 533.

⁴ Bodelian Library Pers. MSS. 589.

men and writers from Iran to Bengal, especially because of trouble in the former country following Nādir Shāh's assassination, and of political instability in northern India after Aurangzeb's death. Many nobles and learned men then came and settled in Bengal. It has already been mentioned that Murshid Qulī Khān used to maintain at his court two to five hundred Qur'ān readers and scholars. Murshid Qulī II, Nawwāb Shujā' al-Dīn Khān's son-in-law and deputy governor at Jahāngīrnagar (Dacca) was a poet himself who used to compose poems under the name of *Makhfi*.¹ The historian Ghulām Husain Ṭabāṭabā'ī, author of *Siyar al-Muta'khherīn*, was an immigrant Persian noble whose parents and other relatives came to Bengal during 'Alīvardī Khān's time. The historian refers to a large number of other immigrants then thronging into Bengal, specially the learned men who lived at the Nawwāb's court. One of the distinguished scholars was Maulavī Muḥammad Nāṣir who was well-versed in astronomy and mathematics. Others included the latter's son Dā'ūd 'Alī Khān (later on assuming the name of Zā'ir Husain Khān after his visit to Karbala), Mīr Muḥammad 'Ālim, a poet, Muḥammad 'Ārif, Mīr Rustam 'Alī Khān, Hayat Beg, Shāh Muḥammad Amīn, Shāh Ādam, etc.² The chief judge of Murshidabad under 'Alīvardī Khān, Qādī Ghulām Muẓaffar, was a profound scholar and an accomplished poet. Another immigrant scholar, Muḥammad Ḥazīn, is spoken of as "a wonder and prodigy of the age" because of his scholarship and knowledge;³ while yet another immigrant scholar, Shāh Muḥammad Ḥasan, is said to have "had no equal in the knowledge of the Arabic language and jurisprudence and in commentaries".⁴ The most distinguished scholar at the Nawwāb's court was however Mīr Muḥammad 'Alī Fādīl who is stated to have had a personal library of two thousand volumes⁵ and to whom 'Alīvardī Khān granted the singular privilege of coming to court by riding a *pālkī* and also used to show him special respect by rising from the *masnad* and

¹ *Siyar*, I., 345.

² *Ibid.*, II., 165-185.

³ *Ibid.*, 176.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 178.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 63, n. (29)

advancing a few steps to greet him.¹ Two physicians, Ḥākim Tāj al-Dīn, and Ḥākim Hādī 'Alī Khān are also spoken of very highly. The latter is described as "the Galen" as well as "the Plato of the age". Of the specific literary works during 'Alīvardī's time mention may be made of Yūsuf 'Alī's² *Aḥwāl-i-Mahābat Jang* (written about 1748), *Ḥadīqat al-Ṣafā* (a biographical work on Persian poets), *Majmu'a-i-Yūsufī* (a miscellaneous compilation) and Muḥammad Wafā's *Wāqī'āt-i-Fath-i-Bangāla* (written about 1748). Some other works, such as Karam 'Alī's *Muzaffarnāmah* (written about 1770), Salīm Allah's *Tārīkh-i-Bangāla* (written between 1760—64), Ghulām Ḥusain Ṭabāṭabā'ī's *Siyar al-Muta'khherīn* (completed in 1781), Ghulām Ḥusain Selīm's *Riayād al-Salātīn* (completed in 1788), and 'Alī Ibrāhīm Khān's *Tārīkh-i-Ibrāhīmī* (completed about the same time) may well be mentioned in connection with 'Alīvardī Khān, for though their works were compiled after his death they were very much a heritage of the late Nawwābī period. For the same reason the romantic Persian poetical composition entitled *Gul-i-Bakāwalī*³ by 'Izzat Allah (1772) may be ascribed to that period.

The above is but a very brief survey of the literary activities in Persian during a long period of more than five hundred years. The names of many writers and their works have not come down to us. Yet those that have survived the ravages of time, oblivion and neglect clearly indicate that there was indeed a great volume and variety of writings embracing almost all branches of literature—creative, narrative, historical, religious, etc. Of these writings the historical and descriptive ones, which seem to be more numerous in comparison to the others, especially later in the period, have naturally an independent value of their own, apart from their literary merit. Creative and religious writings, whatever they were, appear less outstanding than their counterparts in Iran and other parts of the Islamic world. This was perhaps only natural. In fact so far as these two branches of

¹ *Ibid.*

² Son-in-law of Nawwāb Sarfaraz Khan.

³ See S.S. Husain, *A Descriptive Catalogue of Bengali Manuscripts in the Dacca University Library*, Dacca, 1960, 84.

literature were concerned, Muslims in Bengal primarily studied and depended on the latter. For the Qur'ān, *ḥadīth*, important commentaries of the Qur'ān (*tafsīr*), books on *fiqh* and such other subjects produced in other parts of the Islamic world, Muslims in Bengal had only to transcribe and use them. The little that seem to have been written independently was essentially a simplification and popularization of the existing stock and pattern of knowledge. Similarly in the field of creative literature—poetry, stories, etc.—works of the Iranian poets and authors like Ḥāfiz, Sa'dī, Rūmī and Firdausī were eagerly sought after and widely used. The Bengal Persian poets and writers could not obviously shine bright beside those great literary luminaries. The works of the former thus naturally remained confined to their more immediate and close family circles. This is perhaps one of the reasons why we get the names of so many poets, but not their works.

Whatever the quality of the literary works in it, there is no doubt that Persian had become a lingua-franca with the educated and intellectual class of the population, both Muslim and non-Muslim. Many educated Hindus were good Persian scholars. A few of their writings in the late *Nawwābī* and early British period have been discovered. For instance one Chatar Mān Kāyeth compiled a Persian statistical work named *Chahār Gulshān* in 1720; while Kalyān Singh, son of the East India Company's deputy dīwān Shitāb Roy in Bihar, wrote another significant work entitled *Khulāṣat al-Tawārīkh*, in the early sixties of the century. Judging from the fact the many Hindu scholars like Munshī Shyam Prasād (author of *Aḥwāl-i-Gauḍ Wa Pandua*¹) continued to write in Persian till the first part of the nineteenth century, it may be assumed that many of them did so in the earlier period. In fact Persian had become so well-established as a language of education, culture and administration that the East India Company found it necessary to continue its use in the administration of the country for about a century more after their capture of power in 1757. It has already been indicated that till the mid-nineteenth century Muslim and Hindu boys numbered

¹ I.O.L. Pers. MSS. 2841.

almost equally even in the elementary Persian schools in Bengal. It is also well-known that their attachment to Arabic and Persian education was the main reason for the Muslims' rather general abstention from English education till the beginning of the twentieth century. Till the end of the nineteenth century most of their educated persons wrote and expressed their views in Persian.¹ It may also be added that in the recent past there has been rather an intense search for Bengali manuscripts and old works; but, correspondingly, no similar attempt has so far been made to find and collect old Persian works and manuscripts that may still remain scattered in different parts of the country.² Even then, it may be stated on the basis of those that have been collected mainly in the nineteenth century that Persian literary works in Bengal prior to the beginning of that century were no less numerous, in fact far more, than works in the Bengali language.

II. DEVELOPMENT OF BENGALI LITERATURE

Properly speaking, literary activities in Bengali started with the Muslim period. The language was evolved, according to the latest view, not out of Sanskrit but out of a spoken dialect called *Māgadhi Prākṛit* or *Gauḍiṃya Apabhraṃsa*. Nonetheless it is generally classed with the Indo-Iranian branch of the Indo-European languages. No written specimen of early Bengali is, however, available prior to the 10th/12th century, that is almost till the coming of the Muslims to Bengal. In 1907 the late Haraprasād Śāstrī discovered in Nepal a collection of 47 Buddhist mystical and diadectic poems composed by 24 persons and entitled *Charyā-Charya-Biniśchaya*, now generally referred to as the *Charyā Padas*. The term *Chrya* means what is permissible, *Acharya* being its antonym, meaning 'not permissible'. The poems were thus a code of "does and do-nots" for a Tāntrik Buddhist devotee. They are short, all the 47 poems making a total

¹ For instance Khundkar Fuzli Rubbee wrote his well-known *Haqīqat-i-Muslaman-i-Bangālā* in 1893. A number of newspapers in Persian were published in the nineteenth century. Even during the first world war a Persian Newspaper named *Habl al-Matīn* used to be published from Calcutta.

² A recent Bengali manuscript collector states that he found one short and badly mutilated Bengali manuscript in a village in Tippera amidst a heap of Arabic and Persian works. The writer does not however specify the nature of the latter. (Sultan Ahmad Bhuiyan, *Bānglā Sāhityer Itikathā*, Dacca, 1971, 145).

of some 480 lines.¹ Their language, according to competent authorities, was "but poor fragments of a literature" which owed its origin "chiefly to the earnestness of Tantrik Buddhists for popularizing their creed"² and which was "just evolving out of Laukika".³ These poems were published for the first time by their discoverer in 1916 under caption *Hājār Bachharer Purāna Bānglā Bhāsār Gān O Dohā* (Buddhist songs in a thousand years' old Bengali). Since then scholars of Bengali language have regarded these poems as the earliest available specimen of Bengali language and have generally assigned them a period between the 10th and the 12th century. No other writing in Bengali till the fifteenth century has, however, come to light.

Whatever might be the exact date of the *Charyāpadas* it is generally recognized by scholars that no vernacular language could have found a scope for free literary expression under the Brahmanical system which preceded the coming of the Muslims and which interdicted the study of any but the Sanskrit language. A well-known Sanskrit *śloka* (couplet) stated that if a person hears "the stories of eighteen Purānas or of the Rāmāyana recited in Bengali he will be thrown into the hell called Raurava."⁴ One of the most important results of the establishment of Muslim rule was the break-up of this Brahmanical monopoly of knowledge and literary activities and a general freeing of the Hindu intellect from the bondage of caste system. Muslims could not be expected to make any distinction between Brahmans and non-Brahmans in any legitimate sphere of activities, all of them being equally eligible for acquiring knowledge and official situations according to merit. At any rate the spectacle of Muslims translating Sanskrit works into their own languages (Arabic and Persian) could not but encourage the local non-Brahman population to do the same in their vernacular, now that there was no ruling Brahman class to prevent or excommunicate them. And, precisely, it was this type of work which the first Hindu writers in

¹ See for instance Atindra Majumdar, *Charyā-Pada*, Dacca, 1973, 145-219.

² D.C. Sen, *History of Bengali Language and Literature*, Calcutta University, 1911, 5.

³ Sukumar Sen, *History of Bengali Literature*, New Delhi, 1960, 27.

⁴ Quoted in D.C. Sen, *op.cit.*, 7.

Bengali undertook to do and in which many of them probably sought and certainly received the new rulers' patronage. In according this patronage the Muslim rulers, besides their love for knowledge and education, might have been actuated by a feeling that a translation of the Hindu Sanskrit works and a general understanding of their contents by the local people would go a long way to undermining the hold and pretensions of the previous ruling class. Perhaps the same political considerations that had led to the recruitment of non-Muslim population in the army and other services might have also induced some Muslim rulers to patronize the language of the people. Moreover, as time went on and as the Muslims settled in the country and adopted it as their land they naturally became interested in its language. There also came into being a sizeable Bengali speaking Muslim population because of conversion from the local people and of naturalization of immigrant Muslims who had lived for generations in the country. The latter naturally took to literary activities in Bengali. We come across a number of Muslim Bengali poets claiming descent from immigrant ancestors. Also, a number of them composed books in Bengali to counteract the influence of Hindu legends and religious ideas which were being disseminated through the writings of the Hindus and to popularize among the local Muslims information about Islam and stories based on its history and traditions. Later in the period the rise of such Hindu reform movements as Vaishnavism led to a good deal of literary activities in Bengali. Thus a number of factors contributed to the systematic beginning and development of Bengali literature during the Muslim rule.

The first notable literary production in Bengali was a translation of the *Rāmāyana* by poet Krittivās during the first quarter of the 15th century,¹ most probably during the reign of Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad Shāh (1415-1431). The poet praises the Gauḍa ruler for his patronage and also states that the work was

¹ According to some the *Śrīkrishnakīrtana* of Vidyāpati (Baḍu) Chandidās is the earliest work in Bengali; but there is no consensus of opinion about its date. R.D. Banerji thinks that it was composed not later than 1385; while Muḥammad Shahīdullah supposes it to have been composed between 1370 and 1438; and Sukumar Sen assigns it a date after 1550, more likely at the end of the 16th century.

commissioned by him, but does not mention his name. This has led some scholars to think that the Gauḍa ruler spoken of was the Hindu usurper Rājā Kāns.¹ The earliest date of Krittivās's birth, however, seems to be 1398 which would make him only sixteen years old at the time of Kāns's usurpation of power (1413-14). At that early age Krittivās could not have acquired the necessary competence or fame to be commissioned to undertake the translation of the great Sanskrit epic into Bengali. The poet himself states in one place of his work that he only commenced his studies at the age of twelve. Moreover Kāns's time was too full of troubles to allow of such intellectual pursuits. Hence Krittivās did the work in all likelihood under the patronage of Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad Shāh.² The next notable work was by poet Mālādhār Vasu, an inhabitant of village Kulin in Murshidabad district. He lived during the time of Sultān Bārbak Shāh (1459-1474) and his successor Sultān Yūsuf Shāh (1474-1482). Under the latter's patronage the poet composed his *Śrīkrishna-Vijaya* on the basis of the 10th and 11th chapters of the *Bhagavatgīta*. Like Krittivās, Mālādhār Vasu also does not specifically mention the ruler's name; but in one manuscript of the work it is mentioned that it was started in 1473 (1395 Śaka) and completed in 1480 (1402 Śaka).³ The poet also received the title of *Gunarāj Khān* either from Bārbak Shāh or from Yūsuf Shāh. The poet takes care to state that he composed the work because the *Śūdras*, the lowest caste of the Hindus, were not allowed to read the *Purāṇas* in their originals. Some other poets also flourished during the Īlyās Shāhī period.

During the Husain Shāhī period a number of important poets like Vijayagupta, Vipradās Piplāi, Yaśorāj Khān, Kavindra Prameswara and Śrīkara Nandī composed their works. Early in Husain Shāh's reign (1493-1519) Vijayagupta composed his *Padma Purāṇa* most probably in 1494-95, while Vipradās Piplāi wrote the *Manasāmangala*, an epic on the snake cult, about the

¹ D.C. Sen, *Krittivāser Rāmāyana*, Introduction, p. 2, quoted in M.A. Rahim, *Social and Cultural History of Bengal*, Vol. I, Karachi, 1963, pp. 216-217.

² Bhuiyan, *op. cit.*, 101-103, quoting Yogeschandra Vidyānidhī's calculations about the poet's birth.

³ *Ibid.*, 104.

same time. Also during the same reign Yaśorāj Khān composed his *Śrīkrishna-Vijaya*. Kavindra Parameswara received the patronage of Husain Shāh's general and Chittagong governor Parāgal Khān and at his instance translated a part of the *Mahābhārata* into Bengali. A number of Sanskrit works like *Haricharita*, *Krishnalīlā*, *Udbhava-Sandesh*, *Gītābalī*, *Nīlmani*, etc. by various poets were also composed during the time and under the patronage of Husain Shāh. His son and successor Nuṣrat Shāh (1519-1532) was an equally enthusiastic patron of learning and literature. His Chittagong governor Chhuti Khān, son of Parāgal Khān, patronized the poet Śrīkara Nandī who translated the *Asvamedha Parva* of the *Mahābhārata* under his orders. Nuṣrat Shāh himself sponsored another translation of the *Mahābhārata*; but that work has not hitherto come to light. Another poet, Dvija Śrīdhara, composed an epic named *Vidyāsundra* under the patronage of prince Fīrūz Shāh, Nuṣrat Shāh's son. Only one or two pages of this work have been found;¹ so it is difficult to know its exact nature. Judging from other works on the same theme by a number of subsequent Hindu poets it may be assumed that Śrīdhara's work was more in the nature of a religious composition than a human love-story.

The reign of Husain Shāh witnessed the rise of Śrī Chaitanya of Navadvīp, leader of the Bengal *Vaishnava* movement. One of the aims of the movement was to check the progress of Islam among the Hindu population. Its literary aspect was that a number of Chaitanya's followers wrote about his life and teachings in the middle and latter part of the sixteenth century. The most notable of these literary productions were Vipradāsa's *Chaitanya Bhāgavat* (written about 1536), Krishnadās Kavirāj's *Chaitanya Charitāmrita* (composed between 1527 and 1537) and Jayānanda's *Chaitanyamangala*. A number of works on the snake cult also appeared during the century. The more important of them were Chandrāvati's *Manasāmangala* (late 16th century), Dvija Bansibādan's *Manasāmangala* (1675), Sārthibar's *Manasāmangala* (late 16th century), Mukundarām Chakravati's *Chandi-*

¹ Sukumar Sen, *Bāṅglā Sāhityer Itihāsa*, Vol. I., Part II, Calcutta, 1965, 318, n.1.

kāvya (late 16th century) and Mādhavāchārya's *Chandikāvya* (late 16th century). Indeed by the end of the 16th century the Bengal Hindus were well on their way to unimpeded literary activities typifying their religious revival. The tempo was maintained in the succeeding period and throughout the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries many Hindu poets produced a good number of literary works in Bengali. The two most important of these poets were Bhāratchandra and Rāmprasād,¹ both of whom flourished in the eighteenth century. It may be noted, however, that all the writings from the fifteenth till the end of the eighteenth century were in verse; and that all of them, whether narrative or lyric, were concerned with themes related directly to gods and goddesses and their incarnations. Sometimes the Hindu poets naturally presented their themes against the then Bengali social settings making the gods and goddesses appear as human beings born and brought up in Bengal. Nonetheless these writings were essentially religious in their nature and purpose. The cumulative effect of these writings was undoubtedly a great religious upsurge among the Hindus, not the least of which was a considerable popularization of stories regarding their gods and goddesses and an idealization of various local cults like the *Manasā* (snake).

The initial literary activities by Muslims in Bengali appear in a large measure to be a response to the above-noted trend and impact of the Hindu Bengali writings. In their literary efforts the Muslims naturally drew their inspiration and themes from Arabic and Persian sources and, almost in contrast with the Hindu Bengali writings, they dealt with themes and subjects related directly to human life and activities—love-stories, historical traditions, and principles and practices of Islam. For this reason it has been very rightly observed that the Muslim poets, by their introduction of non-devotional narratives and romances, created a new literary age in Bengali literature.² It would not be quite correct to say, however, that those Muslim poets were actuated by

¹ A good discussion about the two poets is Śivaprasād Bhattāchārya's *Bhāratchandra-o-Rāmprasād*, second edition, Calcutta, October, 1967.

² S.N. Ghosal (ed), *Satī Maynā O Lorchandranī*, Santiniketan, 1955, 1; also Sukumar Sen, *Islāmi Vāṅglā Sāhitya*, Burdwan, 1951, 5.

a "secular outlook".

There is no satisfactory evidence of the Muslims' having taken to writing in Bengali prior to the sixteenth century. Two poets only, namely, Shāh Muḥammad Ṣaghīr and Amīr Zain al-Dīn have been assigned an earlier period on a very slender evidence. Only one work of Shāh Muḥammad Ṣaghīr, *Yūsuf-Jolekhā* (*Yūsuf-Zulaikha*) has hitherto been discovered. Four manuscripts of this work are known to exist, three in the Dacca University library, and one in possession of the late Dr. Muhammad Enamul Haq. One of the three manuscripts in the Dacca University library, transcribed by one Tifazil, is intact, the other two being badly mutilated; while that in Dr. Haq's possession is also mutilated. In an earlier part of this latter manuscript, however, Dr. Haq reads the name of a king *Ghyes*, in whose praise certain words are spoken by the poet, and states that the king should be identified with Sulṭān Ghiyāth al-Dīn A'zam Shāh (1389-1410) and that therefore poet Shāh Muḥammad Ṣaghīr should be taken to be the earliest poet of Bengali literature who wrote under the former's patronage.¹ Doubts had been expressed from the beginning about this conclusion, and recently a writer has pointed out that there is no mention of the king *Ghyes* in the un mutilated Dacca University manuscript and that the eulogistic expressions in the relevant portion appear to have reference to king Taimus, father of the epic's heroine Jolekha. The writer therefore suggests on the basis of the style of its language that the work of Shāh Muḥammad Ṣaghīr belonged most probably to the last quarter of the sixteenth century.² As regards poet Zain al-Dīn, only one incomplete, mutilated and badly written manuscript of his work has been discovered. The title-page is missing, but the discoverer of the manuscript (Abdul Karim Sāhitya-Visārad) gave it the name of *Rasūl-Vijaya* on the basis of the presence of this expression at some places in the manuscript. The story of the work is the Prophet Muhammad's (Peace be on him) imaginary war with a Kāfir king named Jaikum. The poet mentions as his patron one Ichhop Khān (Yūsuf Khan). Identifying this latter with

¹ Muhammad Enamul Haq, *Muslim Vāṅglā Sāhitya*, Dacca, 1955, 56.

² S.A. Bhuiyan, *op.cit.*, 14-29, 59-62.

Sultān Yāsuf Shāh (1474—82) a number of scholars have concluded that Zain al-Dīn received his patronage and lived during the last part of the fifteenth century. This is also not very convincing; for nowhere does the poet mention his patron as Yūsuf Shāh and there is no evidence of the latter having ever been known or addressed as Yūsuf Khān. Moreover, if Zain al-Dīn lived at his court where Mālādhār Vasu also composed his work, the two poets would have referred to each other, even if indirectly, in their respective works. Zain al-Dīn also mentions as his preceptor one Shāh Muḥammad Khān who may be identified with the seventeenth century poet Muḥammad Khān who was a disciple of another great poet of the time, Sayyid Sultān, who is also addressed as Shāh Sultān by the former. Probably Zain al-Dīn similarly addressed his preceptor as Shāh Muḥammad Khān, although poet Muḥammad Khān did not himself adopt the title of Shāh. There is also a close similarity between the languages of Zain al-Dīn and poet Muḥammad Khān. Even some portions of Zain al-Dīn's work are very much similar to Sayyid Sultān's work on the same theme. On these grounds it has been suggested that Zain al-Dīn belonged to the seventeenth century and that his patron Yūsuf Khān was most probably one of the many Afghan chiefs who established themselves in east Bengal at that time.¹

The uncertainty about Shāh Muḥammad Ṣaghīr's (and also Zain al-Dīn's) date apart, there is no doubt that he was the earliest Muslim to write in Bengali. His *Yūsuf-Jolekhā* is a significant work in the history of the socio-intellectual evolution of Bengal Muslims in a number of ways. In the first place the poet states his purpose in undertaking the composition as that the people were listening to divers epics and tales, everyone satisfying himself with whatever he was pleased.² The poet therefore decided to provide a true love-story for his readers. The allusion is clearly to the currency in society of other Bengali writings, obviously those by the Hindus, to which the people were being increasingly attracted and of which the socio-intellectual effects were not

¹ *Ibid.*, 70-77, 96-100.

² The poet's Bengali expression is: নানা কাব্য কথা রসে মজে নরগণ ।
নান যেই গুহ্যায় সন্তোষ করে মন ॥

evidently quite to the poet's liking. Incidentally, this is a strong internal evidence showing that Ṣaghīr's was not the earliest work in Bengali. Secondly, the poet says that he made up his mind to write in Bengali, discounting what he called "the fear of sin" and people's blame.¹ "No one writes in Bengali on themes based on *Kitāb* (*Kitāb-kathā*)", writes the poet, "for fear of being blamed by others. I have considered this and have come to the conclusion that the fear is groundless; language does not matter if the subject of writing is meritorious (literally *true*)".² This clearly reflects the prevailing aversion on the part of the Muslims in general to literary activities in Bengali. It also shows the poet's sense of urgency in writing in that language in view of the social effects of the others' writings. Thirdly, the poet states that he derived his theme from the Qur'ān and the *kitāb* (i.e., Arabic and Persian books). In fact the episode of Yūsuf and Zulaikha is alluded to in the Qur'ān; but it was developed into a full-fledged and absorbing human love-story only by a number of Persian and Turkish writers, the most famous of them being Firdausī, Jāmī and Nizām Ganjī.³ Shāh Muḥammad Ṣaghīr avowedly drew on these sources, most probably the Persian works. His purpose was socio-religious; so he chose this theme to supply a true and purely human love-story for his readers, divested of such ideas and notions which were alien to the Muslims' beliefs and culture. Like many of the Hindu writers, however, Ṣaghīr also depicted the characters of his story on a Bengali background, making them appear very much as inhabitants of Bengal, rather than of Egypt, chewing *pān*, riding on *chaudals*, etc.

The lead given by Shāh Muḥammad Ṣaghīr was followed by others. We find quite a number of Muslims writing in Bengali from the middle of the sixteenth century onwards and deriving their ideas and themes from Arabic and Persian sources. The life

¹ The expression is: পাপ ভয় এড়ি লোক প্রশংসা করি মন ॥

² The expression is:

ন লেখে কিতাব কথা মনে ভয় পাই। গণিয়া দেখিলু' আশি ইহ ভয় মিছাই।
দোষের সকল তাক ইহ ন জুয়ায় ॥ ন হব ভাষায় কিছু হব কথা নাচাই ॥

³ See E.G. Browne, *A Literary History of Persia*, II., Cambridge, 1928, 146, 400-4001.

and teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (Peace be on him), his struggles for the propagation of Islam, the heroic deeds of 'Alī, Ḥamza, Khālīd, the generosity of Ḥātem Ṭā'ī, the tragedy of Karbala, and such other episodes and traditions from Islamic history henceforth formed the staple of the Muslims' writings in Bengali. A good number of works were also produced on the principles and observances of Islam. And in general all these literary activities were geared to the need for instructing the Muslim mass in the history and culture of Islam together with its principles and practices.

Closely following Shāh Muḥammad Ṣaghīr in point of time was Daulat Ujīr Bahrām Khān who introduced another romantic theme from Persian sources, that of Laila-Majnu. Bahrām Khān was most probably an officer or minister under the Afghan ruler Sher Shāh's governor at Chittagong. Bahrām Khān's *Laila-Majnu* was composed between the years 1545 and 1553. Originally a love-story of the Arabian desert, it was developed into a popular tale by the Persian poet Nizām Ganjā which in course of time became "one of the most popular, if not the most popular, of all love-stories in the East." Unfortunately no other work of Daulat Ujīr Bahrām Khān has come to light. In later times some other Muslim writers wrote on the same theme. Some Muslim poets also wrote on romantic themes based on north-Indian Hindi originals. Of them Sabirid (most probably Shāh Barīd) Khān's *Vidyā-Sundara*, a love-story between prince Sundara and princess Vidyā, and Muḥammad Kabīr's *Madhumālātī*, a romance between Manohar, a prince of the Kangra kingdom, and Madhumālātī, princess of the fairy kingdom of Mahara, have been assigned to the sixteenth century. Another work attributed to Sabirid Khān is *Ḥānifā O Kayrā Parī* which depicts the heroic but imaginary exploits of Ḥānifā against infidel princes and princesses including one from among the fairies and their ultimate defeat and conversion to Islam.

Of the poets flourishing in the late sixteenth and the first half of the seventeenth century Sayyid Sulṭān (1550-1648) occupies a very important position. His works include *Navī-Vaṃsa*, *Rasūl-Vijaya*, *Ofāt-i-Rasūl*, *Iblīs-Nāmā*, *Shab-i-Mi'rāj*, *Jnān-Chautisā*,

Jnān-Pradīpa and a number of lyric poems of ṣūfistic or mystic nature. The *Navī-Vaṃsa* is an epic-like history of the prophets from the beginning of the creation till the appearance and completion of Prophet Muḥammad's (Peace be on him) mission. One of the remarkable features of the work is that the poet treats all preachers of ancient religions as prophets, including the Hindu gods Vishnu, Śiva, Krishna, etc., and states that when their teachings became corrupt Allah sent the Prophet Muḥammad (Peace be on him) with the Qur'ān to preach the true religion. The work has been described as having even surpassed the *Rāmāyana* as an epic.¹ Sayyid Sulṭān's *Rasūl-Vijaya* (also called *Jaikum Rājār Laṛāi*), as indicated earlier, narrates the Prophet's successful expedition against an imaginary Kāfir king Jaikum, and is most probably based on Persian originals on the same theme.² The *Ofāt-i-Rasūl* is a narration of certain historical facts and incidents immediately prior to and following the Prophet's death. Similarly the *Iblīs-nāmā* is based on the Qur'ānic information about Iblīs, his disobedience to Allah, his expulsion from the heaven and his efforts to misguide people from the right path. The *Shab-i-Mī'rāj*, describes the Prophet's ascent to the heavens as indicated in the Qur'ān. The *Jnān-Chautisā* and *Jnān-Pradīpa* deal with general morality and religious ideas with ṣūfistic leanings.

One of the contemporaries of Sayyid Sulṭān was Shaikh Pīr (1550—1615) whose works *Nūrnāmā*, a cosmogony, and *Naṣīḥatnāmā*, a description of the principles and practices of Islam, have been discovered. His son Shaikh Muṭṭalib was also a writer. His *Kifāyat al-Muṣallīn* gives a detailed description of the rules and formalities of ṣalāt (prayer) and other observances. The work appears to have answered a great social need and to have gained considerable popularity in consequence, for a number of its manuscripts have come to light.³ Another poet of the time, Naṣr Allah Khān (1560—1615?) of Chittagong, wrote several works based on Islam and Islamic traditions, such as *Janganāmā*,

¹ Enamul Haq, *op.cit.*, 145.

² S.A. Bhuiyan, *op.cit.*, 66. Bhuiyan draws attention to two Persian manuscripts on the same theme in the collection of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, Calcutta, namely Ivanov Collection, no. 330 and Mirzā Ashraf Ali collection, no. 127.

³ S.S. Husain, *op.cit.*, 49-60, 62-65, 193.

Mūsār-Sawwāl, *Sharī'at-Nāmā* and *Hidāyāt al-Islām*. Another poet of the same locality, Hājī Muḥammad (1550—1620) wrote an important work entitled *Nūr-Jamāl* dealing with the fundamentals and practices of Islam, together with some discussions on the *ṣufī* doctrines of *waḥdat-al-wujūd* and *waḥdat al-shuhūd*.

The end of the sixteenth and the first half of the seventeenth century was a period of political instability and transition caused by the break-up of the Afghan state in Bengal and the gradual advance of the Mughals. One of the social and demographic effects of this political change was the flight of a large number of Afghan nobles and other Muslims of rank and position towards the easternmost districts of Bengal. Quite a few of these people found shelter at the Arakan court where they filled up important positions in the government. Under the patronage of these men a number of such immigrant Muslim intellectuals continued the cultivation of Bengali literature. A second important feature of this transitional period, and throughout the seventeenth century, was the growth of heterodox and mystic ideas and cults in Bengal. The trend had been forcefully started by Chaitanya's *Vaishnava* movement, and it was reinforced by the growth of *ṣūfism* and the heterodoxy of the Mughal emperor Akbar. The result was the rise of such heterodox thoughts and orders as *Pīrism* and *Faqīrism* (a degenerated form of *ṣūfism*), *Kartabhajā*, *Bāul* and *Satyapīr*. These heterodoxical ideas made inroads upon the Muslim society which, again, was reflected in the writings of quite a few Muslims, mainly of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

The kingdom of Arakan had come in close cultural contact with the Muslim Sultānat of Bengal since the fifteenth century so much so that many of the Buddhist rulers of that country adopted Muslim names for themselves, appointed Muslim officials in their courts and, apparently under the latter's influence, even inscribed the *Kalima* on their coins. Of the Muslim poets who found shelter as well as patronage at the Arakan court in the seventeenth century the most notable are Daulat Qāzī (Qādī), Ālāol (Al-Awwal?), Māgan Siddiqi (Thākur) and Mardān. Daulat Qāzī wrote his *Satī Maynā O Lor Chandrānī* at the request and under the

patronage of Ashraf Khān, described as a Ḥanāfī Muslim who was the adviser (*Mukha-pātra*) and defence minister (*Lashkar-Wazīr*) of king Thiri Thudhamma (reigning between 1622 and 1638). The epic was written on the basis of a Hindi romantic work of the same name by Miān Sādhan.¹ Daulat Qāzī speaks very highly of his patron Ashraf Khān who, we are told, patronized many other Muslim immigrants—Sayyids, Shaikhs, Mughals and Pathans—besides others from among Brahmans, Kshatriyas and Sudras. Daulat Qāzī died before he could complete the work which was subsequently completed by Ālāol.² The latter's life-story as recorded by himself in his works gives an idea of the unsettled political condition of Bengal in the first half of the seventeenth century. Ālāol's father was a courtier or minister (*amātya*) of Majlis Qutb of Fathābād (Faridpur) who, it may be recalled, was one of the allies of the *Bāra Bhuiyān* leader Mūsā Khān.³ Once, while going by boat through one of the rivers in lower Bengal the father and son were attacked by the Portuguese pirates. The father was killed in the battle that ensued while Ālāol was wounded and taken prisoner. Later on he found himself in Arakan where he became a cavalry-officer of the Arakan king. Besides being a good soldier, however, Ālāol was a great scholar, poet and musician, having perfect command of a number of languages—Arabic, Persian, Sanskrit, Bengali and Hindi. Soon his qualities attracted the notice of Māgan Siddiqi (Thākur), who was chief minister of two successive Arakan kings from 1645 to 1660. Māgan was himself a man of learning and a poet. He had Ālāol released from the cavalry, took him under his patronage at court, and commissioned him to render into Bengal the *Padmāvatī*, a famous Hindi romantic epic by Malīk Muḥammad Jaisī. Ālāol accomplished the work with consummate ability and unlike Jaisī, who had embossed his story with mystic ideas and supernatural ornamentation, gave prominence to human life and activities. Ālāol's *Padmāvatī* was completed most probably in 1651. His next work was *Saiful Mulk Badiuzzāmāl* (*Saif al-Mulk Badī'*

¹ Sukumar Sen, *op.cit.*, 322-323

² The work has been edited and published by S.N. Ghosal, Santiniketan, 1955.

³ *Supra*, p.298.

al-Jamāl), based on the same romantic story in the famous Arabian Nights. It was completed most probably in 1658-1659. This was followed by the composition of *Haft-Paīkar* (Seven Portraits), based on the Persian poet Nizām Ganjabī's work of the same name. It was completed after the Mughal prince Shāh Shujā's flight to Arakan in 1660, which is mentioned in the work. The prince, as related earlier,¹ found himself in trouble with the Arakan king who ultimately saw the end of him. The incident had its repercussion on Ālāol's life. He was thrown into prison for his suspected but unfounded complicity with Shāh Shujā'. After a short time, however, the poet was released and was restored to favour at the instance of an influential *Qādī* named Mas'ūd Shāh and a minister at the Arakan court named Sulaimān Siddiqī. At the latter's request Ālāol composed the *Tuḥfa* on the basis of Yūsuf Gadā's Persian work of the same name. It deals with the injunctions and observances of Islam. The work was completed most probably in 1664. Under Sulaimān's patronage and at his request Ālāol next completed the remaining portion of Daulat Qāzī's *Satī Maynā O Lor Chandrānī*. In his old age Ālāol received the patronage of Majlis Nabarāj, an important noble or minister at the Arakan court. At his instance Ālāol rendered into Bengali Nizām Ganjabī's famous work *Sikandarnāma*, which is a collection of enchanting stories that had developed in Persia round Alexander's expeditions. Besides these works Ālāol also composed a number of mystical and lyric poems, mostly in his old age. Though his principal works were mainly in the nature of translations or adaptations from Persian works, Ālāol recreated much in the process. By his richness of diction, humanism and realism, and also by the volume and variety of his compositions, Ālāol was undoubtedly one of the greatest poets of Bengali literature.

As already pointed out Ālāol's patron Māgan Thākur (Siddiqī) also was a poet of no small merit. He was a Muslim born of a Siddiqī family; but the title of *Thākur* was conferred on him by the Arakan ruler who used to confer that title on persons

¹ *Supra*, pp.378-379.

of the highest rank and distinction¹. Māgan was well-versed in Arabic, Persian, Hindi and Bengali². Only one of his poetical compositions, the *Chandrāvatī*, has hitherto been discovered. It is a story of love between prince Birbhān with princess Chandrāvatī and possesses considerable literary merit. Māgan died most probably in 1660. One of his contemporaries and for sometime a contemporary of poet Daulat Qāzī, was poet Mardān. He states his birth-place to be Kanchipuri in Arakan where there lived, according to his description, a number of 'ulamā' and *shaikhs* together with Brahmanas and Kāyasthas who were engaged in literary activities. He wrote an epic entitled *Naṣīb Nāma* (also sometimes called *Nāṣir Nāma*) which is somewhat original in nature in that it is not based on any Arabic or Persian work but on contemporary social life. Its story is that of two merchant-friends promising with each other for giving their respective son and daughter in marriage on their attaining majority. The daughter's father fails in business and becomes poor; so his friend, the son's father, refuses to fulfil his promise; soon, however, the poor friend's fortune changes and the story ends in the marriage of their son and daughter.

The literary tradition established at Arakan by these poets continued for long till at least the end of the eighteenth century when we come across another important Muslim poet named 'Abd al-Karīm Khondkār. He says that his great-grandfather, Rasūl Mia, was a customs officer under the Arakan king, while his grandfather, Masan 'Alī, was well-versed in different languages so that he acted as an interpreter at the port (Chittagong?) in connection with the foreign ships and merchants that used to come there. 'Abd al-Karīm's father 'Alī Akbar also was a man of learning. 'Abd al-Karīm received the patronage of one wealthy merchant named Ṣādiq Nānā Atiabar. At his request 'Abd al-Karīm translated into Bengali a Persian work entitled *Dulla Majlis* in 1209/1798. Previously he had composed two other works, *Hājār Masāil* and *Tāmām Anjari*, also on the basis of

¹ Bhuiyan, *op. cit.*, 120-121, raises some doubt about the identity of poet Māgan with Ālāol's patron

² Sukumar Sen, (*op. cit.*, 343-44), mistakenly states Māgan Thakur to be a Hindu.

Persian works¹.

Of the other poets outside the Arakan-based group but belonging to the seventeenth century mention may be made of Muḥammad Khān (1598-1650), a disciple of Sayyid Sulṭān. Muḥammad Khān traces his descent from a noble family of foreign origin saying that he and his brother Birāhim (Ibrāhīm?) Khān were the sons of one Mumriz Khān, who was the son of Jalāl Khan whose father Nuṣrat Khān was a governor at Chittagong. Muḥammad Khān also states that his maternal grandfather belonged to the Quraish (or Siddiqī) family and that he came in contact with the Afghan leader 'Isā Khān Masnad-i-'Alā who bestowed on him some special favours. Muḥammad Khān's description of his family background has been considered to possess some value for the history of Muslim expansion over Chittagong². Like his preceptor Sayyid Sulṭān, Muḥammad Khān's writings also were principally aimed at propagating a knowledge of Islam and Islamic traditions. His compositions include *Aṣḥābnāma* (a description about the companions of the Prophet), *Qiyāmat Nāma* (a description of the Day of Judgement), *Dajjāl nāma* (an account of the appearance of Dajjāl on the eve of the end of creation as related in Islamic tradition), *Ḥanifār Larāi* (Ḥanīfā's warfare) and *Muqṭal Husain* (the martyrdom of Ḥusain). The last-named work deals with the Karbala episode and is evidently based on some Arabic or Persian work³. Three other seventeenth century poets deserving mention were Sayyid Murta-zā (1590-1662), 'Abd al-Nabī and 'Abd al-Ḥakīm. Sayyid Murtazā was an inhabitant of Murshidabad district and was influenced by mystic and yogic ideas. His best known work, *Yogakālandar*, is a lyric description of some yoga practices. He composed also a number of mystic songs and Persian *ghazals*⁴. 'Abd al-Nabī's most important work was *Amīr Hāmzā*, a rather big epic on imaginary heroic exploits of Ḥamza, uncle of the Prophet. The work was evidently an adaptation of a Persian work on the same

¹ S. A. Bhuiyan, *op. cit.*,

² Sukumar Sen, *op. cit.*, 347.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ S. S. Hussain, *op. cit.*, 55-56.

theme entitled *Dastān-i-Amīr Ḥamza* and was completed most probably in 1684¹. 'Abd al-Ḥakīm belonged to Sondip and was a talented poet. He composed a number of works including *Yūsuf-Jolekha*, *Lālmātī Saifūl-Mulūk*, *Kārbālā*, *Nūrnāmā* and *Chāri Maqām Bhed*. The first three are on romantic themes, the *Kārbālā* deals with the famous episode of that place, while the two last mentioned works deal with some aspects of ṣūfism. He composed another notable work in honour of his preceptor (*Pīr*) Shihāb al-Dīn, entitled *Shihāb al-Dīn Nāmā*, which deals with various religious themes. 'Abd al-Ḥakīm called upon his fellow Muslims to learn at least one of the three languages of Arabic, Persian and Bengali and otherwise stressed the need for education in general.

Similarly during the first half of the eighteenth century a number of Muslim poets wrote on various religious and related subjects. Of them Shaikh Chānd, an inhabitant of Comilla district, composed a number of works including *Rasūl Vijaya* (or *Rasūl Nāmā*), dealing with the life and achievements of the Prophet, *Shāh Daulah Nāmā*, written in honour of the poet's preceptor, and *Qiyāmat Nāmā*, describing the day of judgement in the hereafter. The last named work is historically important in that it contains its date of composition, 1122 B.E. (1734 A.C.), thus showing clearly that the poet belonged to the first part of the eighteenth century, and not to the sixteenth century, as previously supposed by scholars². Another poet of the same district was Shaikh Sa'dī (most probably a pen-name in imitation of the famous persian poet of the same name). He composed an interesting epic called *Gadā Mallikār Punthi* in 1722 narrating the debates of princess Mallikā with the learned men of her time including 'Abd Allah Gadā whom she married because he alone of all the participants in the debate succeeded in answering her thousand questions on social and religious riddles³. Another poet of the same period was Ḥayāt Maḥmūd of Rangpur whose works include *Janganāma* on the Karbalā episode, *Sarvabhed* on morals,

¹ E. Haq, *op.cit.*, 217.

² S.A. Bhuiyan, *op.cit.*, 143-147.

³ S.S. Husain, *op.cit.*, 110.

and *Āmbiyābānī* and *Hitajnānabānī* on religious precepts. Two other poets, both belonging to the Chittagong district, lived during the same period. One of them, Nawāzish Khān, wrote at least two works of a somewhat historical nature, namely, *Pāthān Prasāṅsā* and *Jorwarsingh Kīrti*. The former describes the family history of a Chittagong governor named Husain Khān, and the latter narrates that of the founder of Jorwārganj zamindari. The poet composed also a romantic work named *Gul-i-Baqāulī*, most probably on the basis of 'Izzat Allah's Persian work of the same title¹. The other Chittagong poet, Wazīr 'Alī, wrote his family history entitled *Nasl-i-Uthmān Islamābādī* (with a sub-title *Shāhnāma*) tracing his descent from the third Khalifa of Islam. The work, as one scholar rightly points out, "is a strange amalgamation of truths, half-truths and falsehoods²".

In conclusion certain important features of Muslim literary activities in Bengali upto the middle of the eighteenth century may be mentioned. It was the Muslims who gave the first recognition and encouragement to literary activities in Bengali, and in course of time they themselves adopted it as a means of expression, both literary and otherwise. This was so because they adopted the land as their own and acquired its language through generations of living and association. Its use by them as a medium of literary expression does not appear to have been accomplished, however, without hesitation and misgivings on the part of the writers themselves as also of the others. Indeed, being mostly of foreign origin and having had a rich Arabic and Persian literary tradition with them, such hesitation and misgivings were only natural on their part. The intellectual tension and compromise which inevitably accompanied such a social and literary transition is clearly reflected through the writings of many of the poets, beginning from Shāh Muḥammad Ṣaghīr³, the earliest known poet, down to 'Abd al-Ḥakīm of the late seventeenth century. "I am afraid lest God should be angry with me for having written on religious subjects in Bengali", states the seventeenth century poet

¹ *Ibid.*, 274-276.

² *Ibid.*, 260.

³ *Supra*, pp.860-862.

‘Abd al-Nabī; “but I give up the fear so that I may do good to the common people¹.” “Education in Arabic is the best of all learning”, writes ‘Abd al-Hakīm; “so, if you cannot learn Arabic, then learn Persian and through it secure future benefit. If after all you cannot learn Persian, then you should study the religious subjects through your vernacular... Arabic is the best of all learning and Persian is its son²”. At the same time the poet makes a strong plea for Bengali saying that God understands whatever language He has given to man and whatever is spoken by the people in a land; therefore those who being born in Bengal despise its language should leave the country and go elsewhere. “For generations our ancestors have lived in Bengal; therefore instruction in the language of the country is good for the mind³”.

Such plea and argument is directed to a society which is clearly conscious of its foreign origin and therefore sentimentally attached to Arabic and Persian languages. The pith of ‘Abd al-Hakīm’s plea was that “our ancestors” have lived in Bengal “for generations”, that many of his contemporary generation of Muslims were born in that country, and that therefore instruction in its language would easily enlighten them (would do good for the mind, as he puts it). Equally significant is the fact that many of the poets, indeed most of the wellknown of them, came of families of foreign origin. Some of them specifically claim this, while the others clearly appear to be so from the information they supply about them. Thus not to speak of ‘Abd al-Hakīm, others like Sayyid Sultān, Daulat Ujīr Bahrām Khān, Daulat Qāzī, Māgan Ṣiddīqī (Thākūr), and Ālāol appear clearly of foreign origin, while Shaikh Chānd, Muḥammad Khān, Wazīr ‘Alī, and Nawāzish Khān, to mention a few, specifically claim their descent from foreign Muslim settlers. Also, almost all the poets were well versed in Arabic and Persian, besides Bengali, and to some extent, Sanskrit and Hindi as well. The nature of Muslim society to which the poets generally belonged and which they had in view explains in a large measure another significant fact that many of

¹ Quoted in S.S. Husain, *op.cit.*, 3.

² *Ibid.*, 250.

³ *Ibid.*, 224.

their compositions were either originally written or subsequently circulated in Arabic script. There are about 50 such Bengali manuscripts written in Arabic characters in 'Abd al-Karīm Sāhitya Visārad's collection alone in the Dacca university library. The only manuscript of Sayyid Sultān's *Rasūl Vijaya* in existence is in Arabic script. Shaikh Chānd's *Shāh-Daulah Pīr Pustak* has been found in both Bengali and Arabic scripts. Saiyyid Sultān's great epic, *Navī Vamśa* and Ālāol's *Padmāvatī* were circulated in Arabic scripts. Considering the absence of printing press in those days and the hardships involved in transcribing long and whole Bengali works in Arabic script, it may be easily assumed that none would have undertaken the trouble unless there was a positive social need for such labour. Evidently the use of Arabic script was intended partly to popularize the Bengali works with that section of the Muslim society who did not know the Bengali characters and were otherwise attached to Arabic script because of a consciousness of their foreign origin, and partly to overcome the misgivings about writing religious works in Bengali. But whether written in Bengali or Arabic characters, almost all the works by Muslim poets have Arabic or Persian titles so much so that it is difficult to recognize, by looking at titles alone, whether these are works in Bengali. Even the pagination of those that are written in Bengali characters is from right to left, as in Arabic and Persian works.

Equally noteworthy is the enrichment of Bengali language by the introduction of Arabic and Persian words into it. The use of such words appear for the first time in the works of Hindu writers¹, if only because they were the first to undertake literary compositions in Bengali. In course of time, however, Muslims naturally welcomed and used such words in ever-increasing numbers. Neither with the Hindu, nor with the Muslim writers, however, was the use of Arabic and Persian words in any way unnatural. On the contrary it reflected the existence of a popular language which had come into being through centuries of Muslim

¹ Q.A. Mannan, *The emergence and development of dobhasi literature in Bengal upto 1855*, second edition, Dacca, 1974, 48-63.

rule and the use of Arabic and Persian on official and non-official levels. For in those days poetical works were composed to be recited and understood by the people, and no writer would have unnecessarily burdened his compositions by unnatural semantic novelty involving the risk of their being not understood and therefore not accepted by the generality of their readers or listeners. In subsequent times, specially in the nineteenth century, there was a good deal of purposeful and often unnatural elimination of such loan-words. Even then, according to some recent estimates, there are still some three thousand Arabic and Persian words current in the Bengali language¹.

Finally, though the Muslims adopted and cultivated the Bengali language, and though both Hindu and Muslim writers followed the same verse-forms and drew upon the same treasury of words and phrases, the literary efforts of the two ran on quite two different channels, each having a distinct and rather divergent spirit and purpose. As already indicated, Hindu writers drew their inspiration from their religious sources and dealt with themes related directly to their gods and goddesses. Muslims, on the other hand, drew their inspiration and themes from Arabic and Persian sources, and from Islamic history and traditions. In fact their literary efforts were generally aimed at counteracting the influence of the Hindu literary productions on the Muslim population and to instruct the latter in the principles and teachings of Islam. Indeed many of the writers justified and solaced themselves for writing in Bengali because by so doing they were serving the latter and an overriding purpose. Even the introduction of such romantic themes as those of *Yūsuf-Jolekha* and *Laila-Majnu* from Perso-Arabian sources and the humanization of such north-Indian themes as the story of *Vidyā-Sundara*, was intended as a counterpoise to the Hindu religio-romantic themes around gods and goddesses. Also the stories, often imaginary, of the heroic deeds of such historical figures as 'Alī, Ḥamza and Ḥanīfa were clearly in the nature of Muslim answers to the

¹ S.K. Chatterji, *The Origin and Development of Bengali Language*, I., Calcutta, 1962, 206; M. Shahidullah, *Vangla Bhasar Itivritta*, Dacca, 1960, 7-9. See also W. Goldsack, *A Dictionary of Arabic and Persian words in Bengali*, Calcutta, 1929, reprinted Dacca, 1971.

military exploits of Hindu mythological heroes. Often the Muslim poets did not hesitate to draw a comparison between their heroes and those of the Hindu mythology. "If Bhīm (a Hindu Mythological hero) had been in that fight, he would have fled from the field in all haste", writes Zain al-Dīn while describing a military feat of 'Alī; "and even if Avimanyu (another Hindu mythological hero) was there, he would have betaken himself into the forests... Whether of Rāma or of the Pāndavas, no one has ever heard of such a duel"¹.

¹ Quoted in S.A. Bhuiyan, *op.cit.*, 86. The passages run as follows:

“সদাচর্য্যাকৃত তীক্ষ্ণ অস্ত্র মায়াব ।
 শাশ্বত এমি জন দিয়া স্বাধীন সত্ত্ব ।।
 ক্রিয়া কৃপাণে যৈ বিবর্তি
 মতিমনা ।
 যে সব অস্ত্র দেখি পলাত অমনা ।

 “ক্রিয়া ক্রিয়া ক্রিয়া
 পাশ্চাত্য বন ।
 হেন মনুষ্য না দেখেছি কদাচন ।”

CHAPTER XXXIII ART AND ARCHITECTURE

I: ARTS

Along with learning and literature cultivation of various arts formed an important part of the Muslims' cultural life. There are numerous references in contemporary Bengali literature to their patronage of and interest in such recreational arts as music and dance. We do not have, however, further details about these activities. From what we know about the Muslim contribution to the development of north Indian music¹ it may be said that not only a number of new tunes and rules derived from Perso-Arabian traditions but also some new musical instruments like *shāh-nāi*, *sitār* and *tabla* were introduced in Bengal during the Muslim period. A legacy of that time appears to be the *bhātiālī* song which is still today a speciality of south-eastern Bengal. Like the folk music of the desert the *bhātiālī* is so tuned as to carry the singer's and listener's mind along with the ebb of the rivers (*bhāti*) far beyond into the expansive nature. A variety of this music is the *murshidī* (from *murshid*, meaning religious guide) which was definitely inspired by the influence of *ṣūfism* on the popular mind. The content of the *murshidī* song is devotional and spiritual, often expressed in allegories and similes based on the facts of day-to-day life. Another legacy is the *jārī* song which is essentially a debate in extempore and continuous musical versification relating to aspects of Islamic history and traditions between two artists called *bayātīs* (from *bayt*, meaning verse or couplet). The *bayātī* is assisted by a number of companions who repeat at intervals the main tune and couplet, a device intended as much to add colour and variety to the music as to afford breathing and thinking time for the *bayātī*.

The most concrete examples of the artistic activities of the time are, however, embodied in bricks and stones and are connected mainly with the architectural activities. Broadly, three distinct arts were worked out in burnt clay and on stone. These were the terra-cotta art, the art of stone-carving and cutting, and calligraphy. Various designs of natural scenes and geometrical pat-

¹ See for instance A. Halim, *A History of Indian Music in the Muslim period*, Dacca, 1963.

terns in brunt clay were used to decorate the walls and *mihrābs* of mosques and other buildings. For the same purpose designs were carved on stone. The art of stone-cutting is specially noticeable in the construction of pillars and door-frames. Some good examples of both the terra-cotta art and the art of stone-carving are still preserved in the existing architectural monuments (see Pls. XIX and XXIX). Calligraphy occupies, however, a unique position not only because it is one of the most precious traditions of Islamic art but also because in Bengal it represents a combination of two arts, those of writing and stone-carving, for there the existing examples of calligraphy are confined almost exclusively to inscriptions carved on stone and to decorative religious texts inscribed on walls of mosques. It is obvious that while the style and texts of the writings were prepared by calligraphists, these were worked out on stone by another group of stone-carvers. And in so far as all these three arts are connected with the construction and decoration of mosques it may be observed that they were not only the religious and intellectual centres of the Muslim society but also the focal points of their artistic activities.

The need for transcribing the Qur'ān for general use and the restrictions on representation of animal forms through sculpture or painting were some of the main reasons that led Muslims to apply their skill and energy in developing the art of writing Arabic with a sort of religious devotion and enthusiasm. In this context it has been very aptly said: "The word of God together with the hand of man combined to create perhaps the greatest examples of calligraphy in the history of mankind. The explosive artistic energy created by this new partnership flowed throughout the world or Islam."¹ Indeed there are more styles of writing Arabic than of any other language. However, three main stages in the development of Islamic calligraphy may be briefly indicated. The earliest form of writing is known as *Kūfīc* (from Kūfa, the earliest Muslim town founded in 17 H./683 A.C.) which was a more or less square and angular script. With the progress of time and increase in the volume of writing the angular forms were rounded to facili-

¹ Philip Bambrough, *Treasures of Islam*, New York, 1977, 24.

tate the flow of writing. The transformation took place mainly at the hand of Ibn Muqlah (d. 328/939) and Ibn al-Bawwāb. This new style came to be known as *Naskhī* and was fully developed in the 6th and 7th century of Islam with various decorative forms and designs. A particular style of *Naskhī* script was evolved in north Africa and Spain known as *Maghribī*; while under the Ottoman Turks the highly decorative forms as the *Dīwānī* and the *Tughra* were developed. The *Tughra* writing pays more attention to beauty and decoration than to legibility, accommodating the text within a limited space artistically extending or twisting the letters or words and arranging them not always in strict sequence. The difficulty in decipherment is however largely mitigated by the fact that such writings are mostly limited to the reproduction of well-known texts from the Qur'ān and the *hadīth*. In the seventh century Hijrī (13th century A.C.) the *Ta'liq* (suspension) script was developed in Iran. It is so called because of the tendency of each word to drop down from its previous one. Towards the end of the same century a combination of this form with the *Naskhī*, called *Nasta'liq*, was effected by a famous Persian calligrapher, Mīr 'Alī of Tabrīz. The *Nasta'liq* script is distinguished by the tendency to slope downwards from right to left and also by long flourishes or curves of final letters.

By the time the Muslims first established themselves in Bengal the *Nasta'liq* form of writing had not been fully developed. For this reason as well as because the first Muslim settlers were of Turkish origin, the earliest styles adopted in Bengal were the *Naskhī* and *Tughra*. *Nasta'liq* form appeared later on, mainly in the Mughal period, when Persian influence was at its highest. Within the framework of the *Naskhī* and *Tughra* styles, however, the Bengal calligraphers developed certain local characteristics. It has been very correctly pointed out by one scholar that while the contemporary script of Delhi was "bold and vigorous", as seen in the 'Alāl'ī Darwāzā inscriptions, the Bengal script was from the beginning "highly stylish and ornamental" characterized by "decoracy of form and subtlety of arrangement."¹ These features are notice-

¹ G. Yazdani, *E.I.M.*, 1917-18, 19.

able in the earliest extant epigraphic record of the Bengal rulers, the Bari Dargah inscription (Bihar) of 'Izz al-Dīn Ṭughral Ṭughān Khān dated 640 H. (Pl. XII). In this inscription the letters are set within a beautiful foliage design, and integrating with that design the ends of some letters are also foliated while the tops of some vertical ones are ligated. This style of joining or flourishing the ends of letters may be seen also in the Gangarampur inscription of Jalāl al-Dīn Mas'ūd Jānī, executed seven years afterwards, in 647 H. Two other early and beautiful examples of *ṭughra* writing are Shams al-Dīn Fīrūz Shāh's inscriptions of 709 and 713 H., found respectively at Bihar and Tribeni, Hugli. The style of the latter record seems to have been copied also in the only hitherto discovered inscription of Shams al-Dīn Ilyās Shāh found at Baniapukur, Calcutta.

In the above mentioned Tribeni inscription of Shams al-Dīn Fīrūz Shāh as well as in Ilyās Shāh's Baniapukur inscription may be noticed the beginning of another special feature, namely, arranging the shafts of vertical letters rather prominently so as to produce the impression of a row in a Muslim prayer congregation or of a marching army, while the main parts of the letters are set at the base forming loops and ringlets. Two notable examples of this style are Nāṣir al-Dīn Maḥmūd's Pandua inscription of 863 H. and Bārbak Shāh's Deotala inscription of 868 H. Both of them are evidently the product of the same hand (Pl. XIII). The next important development is the setting of curved letters or combination of letters like ف، ق، ن، ی، فی etc. across the shafts producing an altogether new design variously called the "Bow and arrow" or the "Boat and oar" design. Examples of this style are Nāṣir al-Dīn Maḥmūd Shāh's Bhagalpur inscription of 860 H. and the Hatkhola (Sylhet) inscription of Rukn al-Dīn Bārbak Shāh, dated 868 H. These two inscriptions also appear to be the work of the same hand. The high water-mark of this style was reached in the times of Shams al-Dīn Yūsuf Shāh (879-886/1474-1481) and Shams al-Dīn Muẓaffar Shāh (896-899/1490-1493). The Sultanganj (Rajshahi district) and Darāsbāri inscription of the former ruler dated respectively 878 and 884 H.

(Pl. XIV) and the Ḥaḍrat Pandua inscription of the latter ruler, dated 898 H. (Pl. XV) are perhaps some of the best examples of this design. The same style and standard is maintained, if not improved, in 'Alā' al-Dīn Ḥusain Shāh's Margram (Murshidabad) inscription of 904 H. (Pl.). His Rajshahi inscription of the same year and his Kantaduar inscription, though repeating the same style, are apparently the work of a different and weaker hand (Pl.). The same weakness is visible in Nāṣir al-Dīn Nuṣrat Shāh's Navagram (Pabna) inscription of 832 H. Two other notable examples of *tughra* writing are Jalāl al-Dīn Faṭḥ Shāh's Gunamant Mosque inscription of 889/1484 and that at the Chatmohar (Pabna) mosque constructed by Ma'sūm Khān Kābulī in 999 H.

The *Nasta'liq* style was introduced, as already indicated, during the Mughal period. It may be seen in Shāh Jahān's inscription of 1067 H. found at Hajo in Assam, and Shāista Khān's inscription at Chittagong, dated 1078 H. The *tughra* style was not however altogether abandoned. The Bara Kātrā inscription of the time of Prince Shujā' (Pl. XVI) and that at Parī Bibi's tomb are two good examples of this style during the Mughal period.

It may be noted that the continuity of standard and style depended on the ability and skill of individual artists. The variations in style and standard in the inscriptions of the same ruler show clearly that they were the productions of different and not uniformly skilled artists. It may be assumed that the more skilled ones were from among the immigrant Muslims, though such generalization may not apply in all cases, some non-Muslim writers at the Mughal court being equally or even more adept in Persian penmanship. We do not have the names of Bengal artists, except that of Ghiyāth, the writer of Sikandar Shāh's Deokot inscription of 765, who describes himself *Zarīn-dast* (Golden-handed), most probably an official title which he felt himself justified in mentioning in the record. The art of calligraphy largely occupied the place of painting, though its existence as a distinct art cannot be ruled out. At least during the Mughal period it received due patronage from the rulers and the nobility. We have some portraits of the Murshidabad Nawwābs painted by artists obviously under their

patronage. (Pls. II-X).

II: ARCHITECTURE

A fuller picture is obtainable about the architectural activities of the time if only because a number of monuments are still in a good state of preservation. Before discussing these activities, however, some general characteristics of Muslim Bengal architecture as a whole may be noted. Architectural activities in any country are generally governed by four basic factors—ideals and traditions of the people, purpose and functional requirement of the buildings to be erected, soil and climate of the country, and the available human skill and building materials. These factors often influence one another, and the one or the other is adjusted in accordance with the circumstances of the case. Muslim architectural activities in Bengal show clearly the interaction of these basic factors. As in the field of education and literature, so in the domain of architecture, Muslims had already a well-established tradition with them when they settled themselves in Bengal. The distinctive features of this architectural tradition were the arch, the dome, the minaret and the *mihrāb*, all carried to a high degree of perfection in the construction of mosques and other buildings. These features were common throughout the Islamic world and were likewise adopted in Bengal. Also, the architectural styles developed at Delhi at the time had its influence in Bengal, specially when it came under the latter's authority. The purpose and requirements were also more or less similar. For administrative, military, religious and social purposes the Muslims in Bengal had likewise to erect palaces and forts, mosques and minarets, towers and tombs, as well as roads, bridges and ordinary dwelling houses. In all these structures they naturally followed the patterns and styles already set for the different types of buildings. Nonetheless the country and the climate had to be taken into consideration and this necessarily led to some adjustments of known styles to local conditions. Thus, for instance, the soft and deltaic soil of the land suggested before long the need for using massive foundations and unusually thick walls even for such non-military structures as mosques and ordinary buildings to

achieve durability for them. Again, the narrow and rather disproportionately small doors for many a building seem to have been intended for keeping out the waters of heavy monsoon rains which last in the land for almost half of the year. The same reason seems to have led to the abandonment, after some initial experiments, of open enclosed forecourts for mosques which, unlike those in other countries, came to be made mostly of only a well-roofed and compact prayer chamber. Local tastes and types of houses also had their influence felt. The ordinary dwelling house in Bengal, made of bamboo and similar wooden materials, have usually the *dochālā* (two-sided inverted V shaped) and *chauchālā* (four-sided) roofs with curved eaves. These shapes appear to have early caught the fascination of the Muslims so that many of the buildings erected by them, especially in the pre-Mughal period, have curved parapets and cornices, and even the *dochālā* and *chauchālā* type of roofs made of bricks and mortar.¹ Certain limitations were also imposed by the available building materials. The only readily available material was the alluvial clay which was used for making burnt bricks with the help of the easily available wood in the country. The buildings erected by the Muslims were therefore built mostly of bricks. The only available stone was the black basalt of the Rajmahal hills; but this could not be sufficient for the purpose. Hence stone is found used only in erecting pillars for the support of arches and domes in some cases, and as an outer facing for the brick walls in a few important buildings. In the initial period stone materials from abandoned or ruined pre-Muslim structures were re-used, and if these contained any images or representation of natural forms, these were invariably covered or turned inward of the walls. But in using these materials the Muslims applied a different technique. In pre-Muslim Bengal the construction of true arch was not known, and the balance and strength of a structure depended upon the weight of the bricks and stones placed flat on one another. This method was superseded by the Muslims who introduced true arches and also used lime as mortar. This enabled

¹ The origin of the curved cornice has been traced to the bamboo hut by many a scholar. See for instance Percy Brown, *Indian Architecture (The Islamic Period)*, 8, 38-39, Plate xxix.

them to reduce the size of bricks. Lime was used also as plaster initially on the roof, the dome and the parapet and, subsequently in the Mughal period, on walls as well to make them water-tight.

Many of the architectural monuments of the time have been ruined partly by the ravages of time and neglect, and partly because of wilful spoliation.¹ Even the dates of many of those that exist in a fair state of preservation are not definitely known. Still it is possible to trace the evolution of certain styles and features from a study of the existing monuments. Broadly these may be divided into two categories, the pre-Mughal and the Mughal buildings. The main distinguishing features of the buildings of the two periods are as follows: (i) Most of the pre-Mughal buildings, except the very few early ones, have the curvature of the parapet and the cornice; but this was not adopted in the buildings of the Mughal period in which the parapet and cornice are horizontal and straight. (ii) The arch in the pre-Mughal buildings is two-centred and pointed, emanating from heavy piers or pillars; whereas in the Mughal buildings it is four-centred. (iii) The dome in the buildings of the pre-Mughal period is usually semi-circular and without any shoulder drum so that it lacks height and grandeur. It also rests on pillars which divide the interior of the building (mostly mosque) into aisles and bays. Consequently the number of domes equal the number of aisles into bays, or rather the number of front-doors into side-doors. The domes in the Mughal buildings, on the other hand, stand on shoulders and hence they attain height and beauty. They also rest not on pillars but on transverse arches. Consequently the mosques of the Mughal period are not of the multi-domed type of the previous period, but are mostly either three-domed or single-domed. (iv) Finally, the walls of the pre-Mughal buildings are not plastered, but are decorated generally with terracotta designs. The Mughal buildings, on the other hand, are plastered and the decorations are also generally made of plaster work.

¹ Early in the British period a few zamindars in the neighbourhood of Gaud and Lakhnawati had obtained a sort of exclusive right of "dismantling the venerable remains" of those two cities and "conveying from thence a particular species of enamelled bricks, surpassing in composition the initiative skill of the present race of native inhabitants". Blochmann in *J.A.S.B.*, 1874, 303.

The buildings of the pre-Mughal period may be divided again into three main phases, following in general the political divisions, namely, (i) the earliest buildings represented mainly by the remains in the Hugli district, (ii) the buildings of the early Ilyās Shāhī period till the construction of the Eklākhī mausoleum in 1430, and (iii) those of the later Ilyās Shāhī period of which the style continued through the Husain Shāhī and Afghan periods till the appearance of the Mughals. The most important specimens of these periods together with their main architectural features are briefly noted below.

III: THE EARLY BUILDINGS

The earliest extant architectural remains are found not at the capital cities of Gaud and Pandua but at the Tribeni-Pandua region of the Hugli district. Tribeni lies at the diverging point of the three rivers, the Sarasvati, the Bhagirathi (popularly called the Gangā) and the Jumna. Here lies the tomb of the famous west Bengal governor Zafar Khān Ghāzī and a rather large mosque built by him in 698/1298.¹ The remains consist of two enclosures built of large stones, one lying along the river bank and the other joining the west wall of the first. This second enclosure contains Zafar Khān's tomb. Into the wall of the eastern enclosure is fixed at a height of about 6 feet from the ground a piece of iron, said to be Zafar Khān's battle-axe. The mosque stands about 30 feet to the west of the second enclosure. Both the tomb and the mosque contain materials taken from pre-Muslim structures. The tomb consists of two square rooms, the west one containing Zafar Khān's grave. The mosque measures externally 76'9" by 34'7". It has five front-doors, and two each on the northern and southern sides. The front doors are formed by four huge hexagonal piers supporting the five pointed arches of the doorways. Corresponding to these five doors the western wall has five equal *miṣrābs*. The interior is divided into two aisles and five bays by a row of stone pillars, thus producing 10 spaces in all for the ten domes above them in two rows of five each, resting

¹ See the inscription in *J.A.S.B.*, 1870, 285-87; *E.I.M.*, 1917-1918, 13-15, Pl. II. The tomb inscription is dated 713/1313, *ibid.*, 33-34, Pl. XIIa.

on the successive arches springing from the pillars and the corbelled pendentives at the corners. Seven of the ten domes, the front five and two of the back row, are in tact. The basalt stone pillars supporting the arches are short and therefore appear unusually thick, an outcome supposed to be due at least partially to the paucity of stones.¹ The same reason is adduced for the use of burnt bricks for building the core of the walls and the whole of the domes, with lime used as mortar. The walls have stone coverings. And although the general plan of the structure is Islamic, many of the details are "broadly Hinduistic", because of the dependence of the early Muslim settlers "almost entirely on Hindu artisans." The carvings on the pillars, on the front wall and round the *mihrābs* are "more or less copies of Hindu ornamentations." The influence of the climate might be discerned from the absence of any open court or minaret from this earliest existing mosque in Bengal. On the whole Zafar Khān's mosque provides the earliest example of certain features which appear in Muslim Bengal architecture. These are (a) the brick-and-stone style of construction in which stone is used as an outer cover for the brick core of the walls; (b) the use of lime as mortar; (c) the number of *mihrābs* in the western wall corresponding to the number of doorways in the eastern wall; (d) the interior divided by rows of pillars into as many aisles as there are side doorways and into as many bays as there are front doors; (e) the squares formed by the rows of pillars being each covered by a hemispherical dome so that the number of domes equals the number of bays into aisles; and (f) the abandonment of open court and minaret.

Coming close to Zafar Khān's mosque in point of time as well as style are a group of buildings at Chhota Pandua, also in the Hugli district, a few miles to the north-west of Tribeni. There were formerly fortifications at the place, traces of which could be seen as late as 1870.² The most important structures there are a tower, a long and big mosque, the tomb of Shāh Ṣafī al-Dīn and another small mosque near it. There are also two old tanks, one to the south of the tomb, and the other to the north of Pandua itself.

¹ M.M. Chakravarti in *J.A.S.B.*, 1910, 25.

² *P.A.S.B.*, 1870, 121.

The exact date of construction of the tower is not on record, but its shape and size "mark it out as a victory tower, and as such it must have been one of the earliest buildings erected at Chhota Pandua."¹ In its general rounded plan it resembles the *Qutb Minār* near Delhi, but it is much smaller in size and also differs from the latter in details. The Chhota Pandua *minār* is constructed of bricks and is about 125 feet in height. It is divided into five unequal sections or storeys, each lessening in diameter from the one below it. The first and second storeys are each 25 feet, the third thirty feet and the fourth 18 feet in height. The diameter at the basement is 60 feet, and that at the top is 12 feet. The *minār* has a beautiful entrance at the foot, leading to an internal circular staircase going up to the top. At the base of each storey is a door giving access to a narrow gallery around the minar formed partly by projecting the cornice and partly by narrowing the base of the succeeding storey. The outer faces of the walls of the middle three storeys have rounded flutes. The plaster on the walls as well as the top finial might be later additions.²

The big mosque lies about 175 feet to the west of the *minār* and is popularly known as the *Bari Masjid* (Great Mosque). It has no inscription on it. Hence the exact date of its construction is not known; but it has been supposed to belong to the first quarter of the fourteenth century.³ It follows closely, however, the plan and style of Zafar Khān's mosque at Tribeni on a larger scale. The Chhota Pandua mosque measures externally 231 feet by 42 feet with 21 front doors and correspondingly 21 *mihrābs* in the west wall. There are three doors on each of the northern and southern sides. Accordingly the interior is divided into three aisles and 21 bays by two rows of 21 pillars each, thus producing 63 spaces for the 63 hemispherical domes above them, resting on a succession of transverse arches springing from the pillars, the corners being rounded by pendentives. The walls, the arches and the domes are of bricks; the pillars are of basalt stone, each six feet high but varying in shape and size—some octagonal, others

¹ A.H. Dani, *Muslim Architecture in Bengal*, Dacca, 1961, 46.

² *Ibid.*

³ M.M. Chakravarti in *J.A.S.B.*, 1910, 24.

square at the base and octagonal above. About half of the total of 42 pillars are carved with garlands and bell motifs, the rest uncarved. The space between the doors is the same as the thickness of the wall, which is 5'3". The stone pillars forming the frame of the *mihrābs* as well as their walls are carved with chain, bell and floral motifs, as in Zafar Khān's mosque at Tribeni. Two additional features of the Pandua mosque are the canopied pulpit on a raised platform to the left (north) of the central *mihrāb* and a high masonry platform with a small room on it, in the north-west corner of the mosque. The platform has been variously described as either the *chillakhāna* (retiring room) of Shaikh Ṣafī al-Dīn, whose tomb lies nearby, or a ladies' gallery. Most probably it was used for educational purposes, as an academy or *madrasa*. The canopied pulpit was obviously used for the *imām*'s Friday sermon. It has a flight of steps made of carved stones, and the canopy is rested on four pillars with three arches and openings on three sides, front (east), north and south. Most of the southern part of the mosque is in ruins. Shāh Ṣafī al-Dīn's tomb and its adjacent small mosque, lying a little to the west of the big mosque, are later constructions, the mosque being actually built in 882/1477.¹

IV: BUILDINGS OF THE EARLY ILYĀS SHĀHĪ PERIOD

Zafar Khān's mosque and tomb at Tribeni and the tower and mosque at Chhota Pandua are the only monuments belonging to the early period. In the Ilyās Shāhī period which followed, an attempt was made to build a grand mosque on the traditional style; but soon this style was abandoned and a special style, showing some local features was developed in course of time. "Among such peculiarities may be mentioned curved battlements, four corner towers octagonal and rising just above the battlement, many low domes without any base of cylindrical drum, height low in comparison with length, and in consequence openings generally insignificant, a profusion of brick carvings and in several instances of fine glazed tiles."²

¹ See *infra*, p. 899.

² *J.A.S.B.*, 1910, 25.

The oldest and the most imposing of the early Ilyās Shāhī architectural monuments is the Adina mosque at Ḥaḍrat Pandua built by Sulṭān Sikandar Shāh in 776/1375¹ (Pls. XVII-XVIII). As Sir John Marshall points out, it is the “most ambitious structure of the kind ever essayed in eastern India.”² It is designed on the great Al-Walīd’s mosque at Damascus, with which it also compares in size, being externally 507½ feet by 285½ feet, having also an enclosed open court and four engaged corner towers, though they do not go much beyond the parapet wall. The main difference with the Damascus prototype is the absence of the ablution pond in the courtyard of the Pandua mosque and in the style of its covering the central nave and side aisles respectively by an elongated barrel vault and multiple domes, instead of a dome and garbled roof respectively, as in the Damascus mosque. There is also no grand gateway in the centre of the eastern side of the Adina mosque which much retards its architectural beauty. The open courtyard measures 400 feet by 150 feet,³ to the west of which is the main hall or prayer chamber proper. It is divided into five aisles by four rows of pillars, which are again divided into a northern and southern wing by a central nave occupying the space of three bays and demarcated by four thicker pillars each on both the sides in line with the other pillars. Besides these pillars there are 17 pillars in each of the four rows in both the wings. Each wing has therefore 18 bays, with 18 doors opening to and from the courtyard (and its side aisles) and correspondingly 18 *mihrābs* in the western wall, except that in the northern wing the first *mihrāb* from the nave is cut into a door. The nave measures roughly 64 feet by 33 feet and was covered, as already pointed out, by a barrel vault. It is approached from the courtyard by a

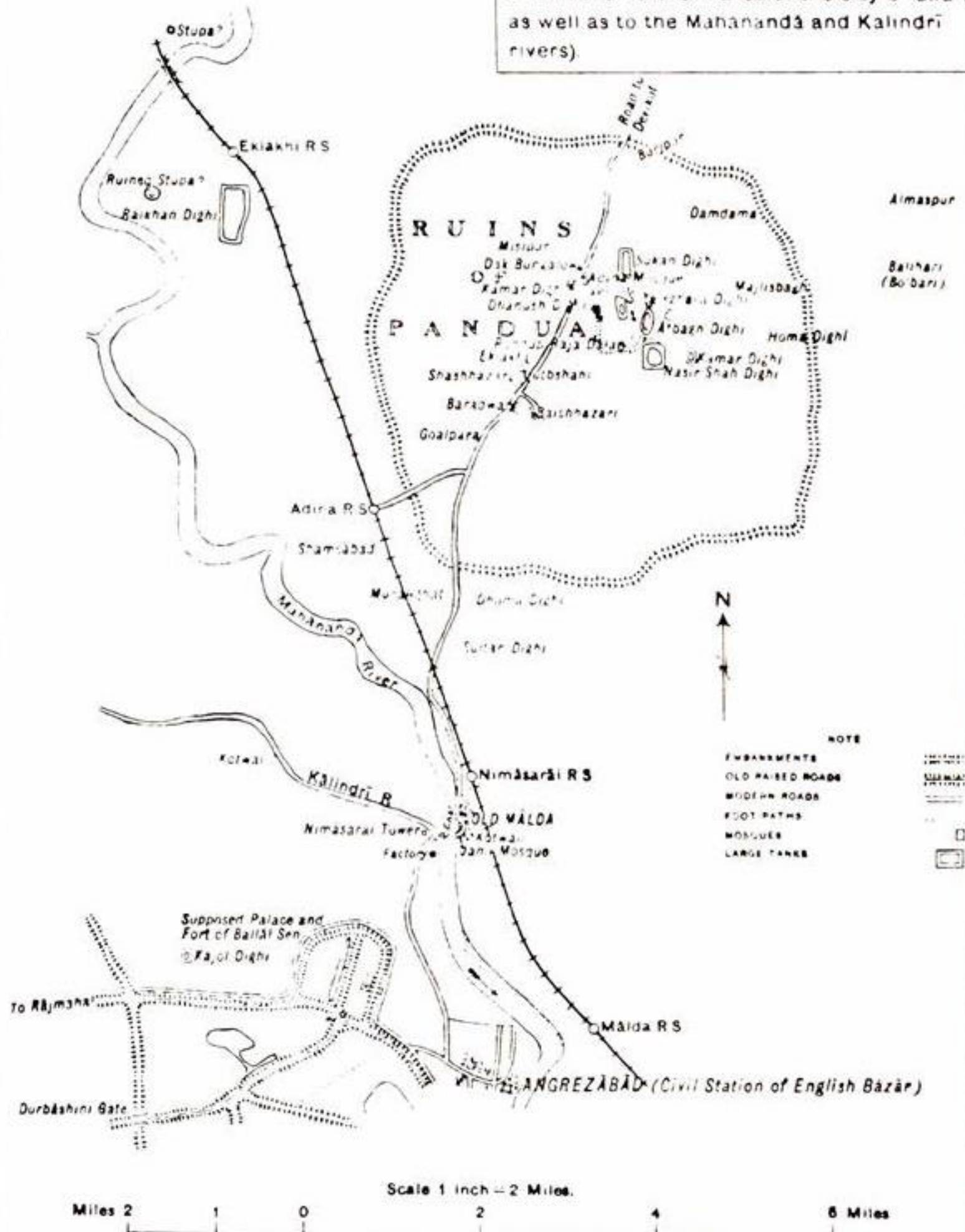
¹ See the inscription in S. Ahmad, *Inscriptions*, 35-38. Ahmad, following Blochmann and others, reads the date a 6 Rajab, 770; but the photograph of the inscription produced by him (Fig. 14, plate III) shows the word six (ست) after Rajab. Hence, as Dr. Dani points out, the correct reading should be 776 H. (Dani, *op.cit.*, 55, n.5). See also *supra*, p. 139.

² *C.H.I.*, III, 602.

³ According to Dr. Dani, *op.cit.*, 60. Percy Brown gives the measurement as 400 feet by 130 feet (*op.cit.*, 37) while both M. Chakravarty (*op.cit.*, 30) and S. K. Saraswati (*J.I.S.O.A.*, 1941, 16) state it to be 397 feet by 159 feet. The figures written by Dani in his plan (fig. 3, p. 59) is obviously mistaken, as it shows the size of the courtyard as 507½ feet by 285½ feet, which is in fact the external dimension.

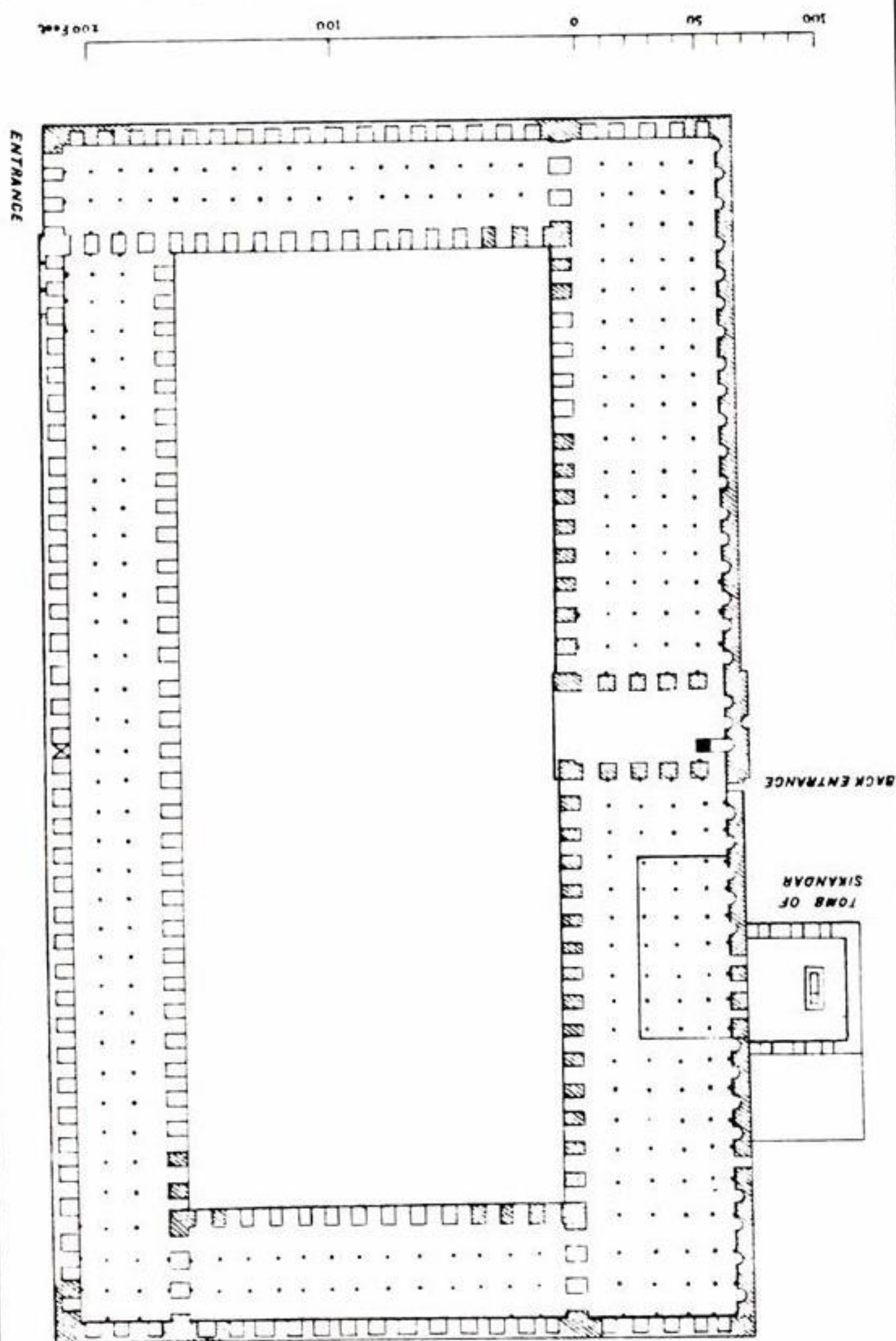
SITE PLAN OF THE ANCIENT CITY OF PANDUA

(Showing its geographical relations to the towns of Malda, Nimasara and English Bazar, the northern area of the city of Gaur, as well as to the Mahanandā and Kalindrī rivers).



After Pemberton: Revised by H.E.S. from Air Survey
Photos by courtesy of the Arch. Survey of India, 1930.

PLAN OF THE ADINA JAMI MOSQUE, PANDUA



(After Cunningham)

(To face p. 887)

gigantic central archway, 33 feet in span and more than 60 feet in height, flanked on either side by a line of 18 arches of 8 feet span each (3 on each side being taken up by aisles on the northern and southern sides of the courtyard. There is a bigger central *mihrāb* in the west wall of the nave, flanked on the southern side by a subsidiary *mihrāb* and on the north by a canopied pulpit on a raised platform. In fact the central and the subsidiary *mihrābs*, together with the pulpit take up the spaces of three ordinary *mihrābs* and balance the central nave with the side wings. In the northern wing, touching the western wall and occupying the space of three aisles and six bays (from the fourth to the ninth) is a platform in the shape of an inner second storey, which is commonly known as *Pādshāh-ka-Takht*, or a ladies gallery. There are openings from the latter through the western wall, most probably meant for private access. The ordinary pillars are 10 feet high and 18 inches in diameter, except those supporting the *Pādshāh-ka-Takht* which are octagonal and thicker, being $3\frac{1}{2}$ feet in diameter. The courtyard is enclosed by cloisters, 3 aisles deep on each of the northern, eastern and southern sides. Around the courtyard is a continuous facade of arches, as in the Damascus mosque, numbering in all 88, and surrounded by a horizontal parapet, 22 feet from the ground, above which are seen the domes over each bay numbering in all about 390, besides the barrel vault over the central nave. The vault and most of the small domes have fallen, and scores of its some 260 pillars have disappeared, most probably because of wilful ransacking in subsequent times. Adjoining the back of the western wall of the northern wing is a square chamber, 42 feet on each side of the interior, which is divided into three aisles and three bays by two rows of two pillars each, thus producing nine square spaces above which stood nine domes, resting on arches springing from the pillars. It is said that the chamber contains the grave of Sikandar Shāh, the builder of the mosque.¹

The screen of arches in the courtyard of the Adīna mosque is the first of its kind in Bengal and makes, as Dr. Dani points out,

¹ *Memoirs*, 138-139.

“a fundamental advance over the clumsy arches springing directly from the pillars, as seen in the mosque of Zafar Khān Ghāzī... Here no pillars have been used in the front row, but instead we have wide piers forming an inseparable element of the long front wall. It is from these piers that the front row [of] arches spring, thus giving rise to a system of arched facade in Bengal, as opposed to pillar-and-arch construction in the previous period.”¹ The chief defect of the whole construction, as indicated already, is the absence of any grand gateway in the middle of the eastern front to balance the archway of the central nave. Instead there are only three small entrances in the south-eastern corner, and a small one in the middle of the eastern wall. The main appeal of the Adina mosque is, however, its grandness. It is said that Sikandar Shāh’s purpose in building this grand mosque was to accommodate the entire population of Pandua in one congregation in the mosque.² “To the spectator standing within the expansive quadrangular courtyard of the Adina Masjid, surrounded by its seemingly endless array of archways many of them fallen,” writes Percy Brown, “the conception as a whole presents the appearance of the forum of some ancient classical city rather than a self-contained Muslim house of prayer, with the high vaulted sanctuary on the western side simulating an imperial approach in the form of a majestic triumphal archway.”³ Nevertheless the detailed decoration of the different parts of the mosque, the stone carvings and terracotta ornamentation on the pillars, wall and *mihrābs*, are considered to be masterpieces of art (Pl. XIX). “Considered by themselves the several parts and the details are admirable enough: arched aisles, for instance are dignified: the vaulted liwan is well proportioned and pleasing and the *mihrāb* is as exquisite a piece of carving as can be found in India.”⁴ And although no subsequent mosque appears to have been constructed on such a traditional and grand design with an open enclosed courtyard, probably because of climatic considerations, the Adina mosque

¹ Dani, *op.cit.*, 60-61.

² *Memoirs*, 138.

³ Percy Brown, *op.cit.*, 37.

⁴ *C.H.I.*, III, 602.

introduced some new features, such as the corner towers, the central nave dividing the hall into a northern and a southern wing, terracotta decorations and an improved type of arch construction, which were adopted in subsequent buildings.

The earliest architectural monument showing the influence of at least the decorative features of the Adina mosque is the tomb of Ghiyāth al-Dīn A'zam Shāh (792-813/1390-1410) at Sunārgāon, Dacca district (Pls. XX-XXI). It is also the earliest existing Muslim architectural monument in Bangladesh. It stands on the bank of a dried up tank, formerly known as the *Magh Dīghī*. It is a carved stone structure, much in ruins. Writing in 1874 Dr. James Wise stated: "This tomb has fallen to pieces. The iron clamps that bound the slabs together have rusted, and the roots of trees have undermined the massive stones. This mausoleum formerly consisted of a ponderous stone which occupied the centre, surrounded by pillars about five feet in height. These stones are beautifully carved, and the corners of the slabs and the arabesque tracery are as perfect as the day they left the workman's hands. The stones are formed of hard, almost black, basalt... What increases the surprise of the visitor at seeing this tomb is the contrast between the beautifully carved stones strewn the bank of filthy hole and the wild luxuriance of the surrounding forest."¹ The beaded ornamentation on the lower line of the cornice and the arched niche in the wall with the hanging lamp motif are clearly of the same type as are seen in the Adina mosque.

The next stage of development showing a transition from the traditional to a local style, specially the curvature of the parapet, is marked by the Eklākhi building, also at Ḥaḍrat Pandua (Pl. XXII) which contains the graves of Sultān Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad Shāh (818-835/1415-1431), his wife and son. The name of the building is said to have been due to the cost of its construction having been one *lakh* (100,000) rupees.² It is the earliest single-domed square type of building made almost entirely of bricks, except for the door frames, which are of stone, and two courses of stone slabs within the wall, one at the ground

¹ J. Wise, "Notes on Sunargaon, Eastern Bengal", *J.A.S.B.*, 1874, 88-89.

² *Memoirs*, 125.

level obviously to prevent damp, and the other at the level of the door. Hitherto we have only examples of multidomed structures, wherein the domes are small, usually from 10 to 12 feet in diameter, and resting on a series of pillars and arches which divide the interior of the building into aisles and bays. In the Eklākhi building an attempt is made for the first time to construct a big dome, almost 48 feet in diameter, over an entire building without the support of pillars. This consideration obviously lay at the root of its ground plan being almost a square, measuring externally 78'6" by 74'6", and the walls being very thick, 13'6" at the sides, so made undoubtedly to enable them to bear the weight of the dome and be durable at the same time. For the same purpose of constructing the big dome, the interior of the building is transformed into an octagon by filling the corners with brickwork right from the ground, in order to dispense with pillars and to prepare the base for the dome, the upper corners of the octagon being rounded by using squinches. It was a rather crude method for building a large dome. It left the walls at the corners unusually thick, which is sought to be relieved by constructing a cell inside the wall at each corner. There are four openings on four sides of the building. The semicircular dome rests directly on the octagon of the interior, there being no drum as its basement, so that it looks low and stunted. Besides the big dome another new feature of the building is the gentle curve of the parapet and the cornice, which appears for the first time and which has been generally attributed to the influence of the Bengal bamboo house style. Two other new features are the use of enamelled tiles for ornamentation and a decorated string course horizontally through the middle of the walls on all sides which simulates "an appearance of two stories." As in the Adīna mosque, we have here also the four corner towers, but they are now octagonal, one full and two halves of the eight facets being integrated into the wall. The lower and upper parts of the towers have mouldings with decorations of hanging and floral motifs. The ceiling is neatly plastered showing traces of painted decorations. The exterior is very highly ornamented by vertical off-sets and recesses, already seen in the Adīna mosque. To the same source may be traced the

ornamental panels above the horizontal string course and the decorative small niches at the cornice. Thus the Eklākhi building is unique in so far as it combines a number of old and new features. "But in spite of its pleasing lines and beauty and variety of low terracotta ornamentations," to quote Saraswati, "the Eklākhi fails in comparison with similar tomb constructions in the west of India... and the semicircular dome, however massive, over a square structure leaves the corners bare—a void that accentuates the loss of balance and organic unity in the whole structure."¹

V: LATER ILYĀS SHĀHĪ PERIOD

(A) THE ILYĀS SHĀHĪ BUILDINGS AT GAUD

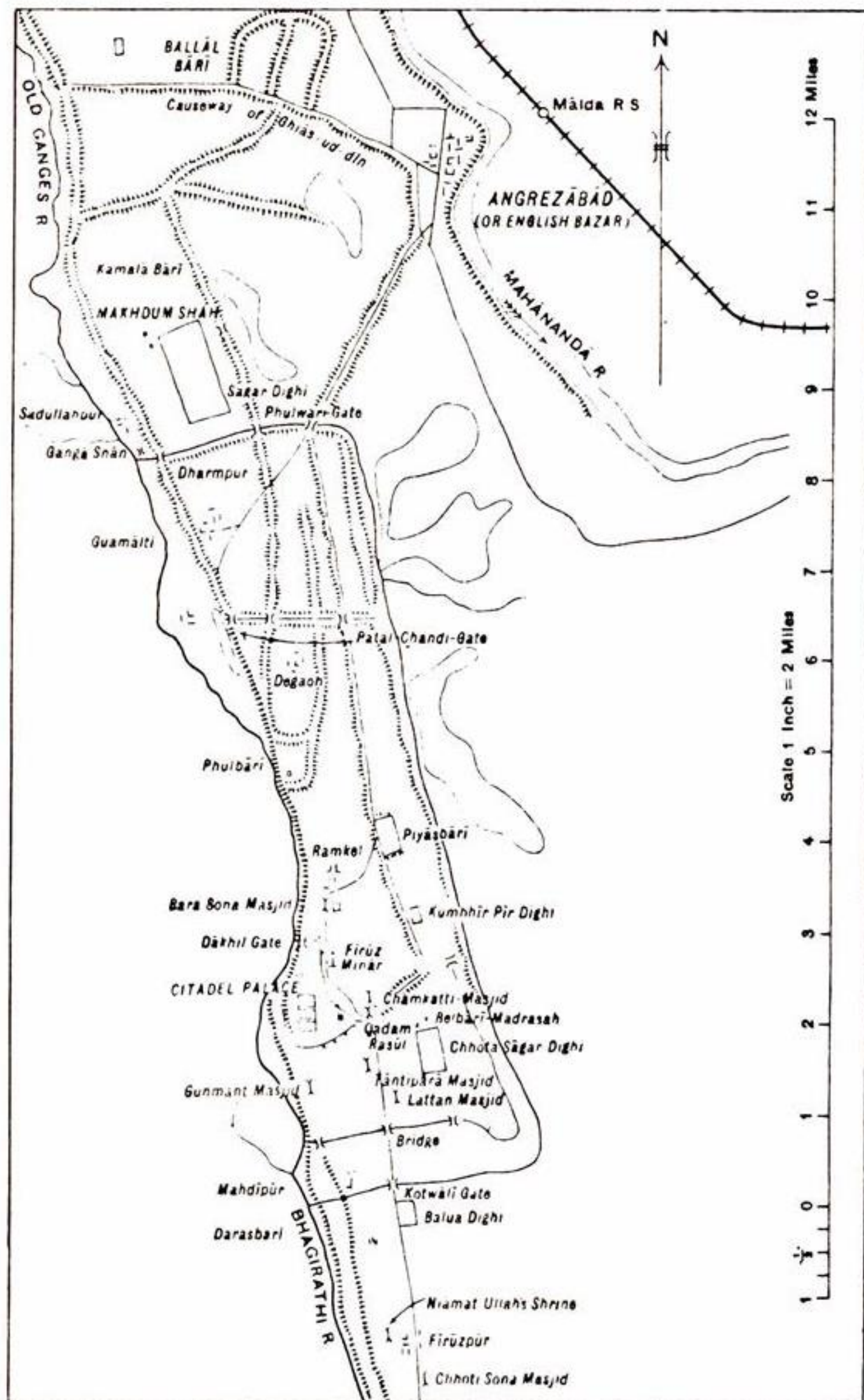
The experience gained so far in building multi-domed and single-domed structures, as typified by Zafar Khān's mosque and the Adīna mosque on the one hand and the Eklākhi building on the other, was put to use in the later Ilyās Shāhī and Husain Shāhī periods with marked improvements in different features. The most important architectural remains of this period are found in the ruined city of Gaud, where the capital was now shifted, with notable examples at such outlying places as Sunārgāon, Khalīfatābād (Bagerhat) and Devikot (Dinajpur). The ruins of the city of Gaud extend for about 12 miles from north to south along the eastern bank of the river Bhagirathi; but most of the important structures, including the citadel and the palace complex, are located in the southern part of the city. The city was surrounded by earthen ramparts and raised causeways to protect it from floods. One of the earliest and most imposing structures is the main entrance in the southern wall of the city called the *Kotwālī Darwāza* (gate), much of which is now in ruins. It is a lofty brick-built archway, 31 feet in height and 16 feet in span, with a passage of 17'4", which is the thickness of the structure. On both of its inner and outer sides there are tapering semi-circular turrets projecting from the walls. The gateway was built most probably by Sulṭān Nāṣir al-Dīn Maḥmūd I, the first restored Ilyās Shāhī

¹ *J.I.S.O.A.*, 1941, 21.

ruler, who had shifted the capital to this place. The same ruler also built the citadel and the palace complex, or at least the major part of them. The ruins of these two lie about 2 miles to the north of the *Kotwālī Darwāza*, within the city, along the old bank of the river. The citadel is nearly a mile in length from north to south, the breadth varying from a quarter of a mile in the north to about half a mile in the south. It is formed by a great earthen rampart on all sides, about 190 feet thick at the base and more than 30 feet in height, and surrounded by a deep ditch about 20 feet wide, except on the river side. Within the citadel and occupying its southern part lie the ruins of the palace complex enclosed by a massive brick wall, 15 feet thick at the base and 8'10" at the top, with a height of more than 40 feet, for which reason it is popularly called the *Bāisgazi* (22 yards high) wall. The wall now exists only on the northern and eastern sides. The palace complex is also badly in ruins from which it is only clear that it was divided into three parts, each having a tank. The only structure still in tact and ascribable to the Ilyās Shāhī period is in the north-eastern part. It is called the *Chika* building and is a close copy of the *Eklākhī* building in both size and design.

Of particular architectural importance is the main entrance into the citadel, called the *Dākhil* or *Salāmī Darwāza*, situated at the north-western corner of it. It marks an important improvement in the art of building arched gateways in Bengal. It is a complete and well-balanced building in itself, measuring 113 feet 2 inches by 73 feet 4 inches, with four twelve-sided and tapering corner turrets, each five-storey high and crowned by a cupola. The facade is about 60 feet high, while the archway on each side is 34 feet high, flanked by "a pylon-like buttress" on each side of the frontage. The vaulted passage which runs length-wise through the building is 14 feet wide, on both sides of which are two guard-halls, each measuring 74 feet and 7½ inches by 9 feet and 7½ inches, and each with four openings to the passage and two others on the outer side. According to 'Ābid 'Alī Khān, "the existing building was first constructed with ornamental facing-work all round, but the base of the building on the east and the west was later covered with earth and connected with [the]

MAP OF GAUD SHOWING ANCIENT SITES



After Cunningham, Pl. XIII, Vol. XV, Arch. Survey of India Report

(To face p. 894)

adjoining rampart walls.”¹ The *Dākhil Darwāza* appears to be the height of excellence that the Bengal brick masons were capable of achieving. “In design”, writes Percy Brown, “the *Dākhil Darwāza* implies an interesting fusion of the classic and the romantic, with traces of the indigenous or rustic. The classic is represented by the grand shape and proportions of the portal and its arched portico, and the romantic quality may be seen in the position and slope of the corner bastions, while the influence of the country may be observed in the ingenious surface treatment obtained by a system of vertical and upright lines and mouldings thus presenting a naively elementary pattern of rectangles.”¹

The road from the *Dākhil Darwāza* to the palace wall was intersected by two other gates, popularly called the *Chānd Darwāza* and the *Nīm Darwāza*. The latter stands exactly half-way to the palace wall and is probably therefore called *Nīm Darwāza* or the “Half-way Gate.” Why the *Chānd Darwāza* is so called is not known. The inscription on the *Nīm Darwāza* states that it was constructed in 1466 by Sultān Rukn al-Dīn Bārbak Shāh.² It is built of brick and stones, in “a magnificent style” of Muslim architecture, the gateway itself being 48 feet in height, while that of the arch 32 feet.

Outside the citadel but within the city of Gaud there are at least 7 monuments which belong to the later Ilyās Shāhī period, including that of the Abyssinian rule. These comprise one bridge, 5 mosques and a *minār*. The bridge exists over a rivulet in the southern part of the city, not far from the *Kotwālī Darwāza*. According to the inscription on it it was constructed in 1457 by Sultān Nāṣir al-Dīn Maḥmūd I.³ It is a cambered five-span bridge, 275 feet long and 27½ feet broad. The spans rest on five arches built on brick piers with triangular cut-waters. Of the five mosques the oldest is the one called *Chāmkāti* (skin-cutters’) mosque, constructed in 880/1475 during the time of Sultān Yūsuf Shāh.⁴ It is modelled on the *Eklākhī* building as well as an improvement on

¹ *Memoirs*, 51.

² Percy Brown, *op.cit.*, 40.

³ *Memoirs*, 56-58.

⁴ *J.A.S.B.*, 1875, 289.

⁵ Cunningham, *op.cit.*, 60-61.

it. Like the latter the *Chāmkāti* mosque is a single-domed square structure measuring internally 23 feet and 8 inches on each side; but to this square hall is added in the east a vaulted corridor, 10 feet wide. Moreover the interior of the mosque is not turned into an octagon, but is kept a square by using eight stone pillars placed at each angle of the notional octagon. On these pillars rest the arches and the squinches which support the dome above. There are three doorways in the eastern wall, but only one *mihrāb* in the western wall. Corresponding to the three doors in the eastern wall the corridor has three openings on the eastern side, and one in each of the northern and southern sides. The mosque is built of bricks, but some lower courses in the interior show stone facing. The battlements are slightly curved and the eastern facade is decorated with vertical panels bordered with glazed tiles in various patterns and also ornamented with chain and floreate motifs.

The addition of a covered corridor to the east of the main prayer hall or mosque proper, as noticed in the *Chāmkāti* mosque, is evidently a compromise between the climate and the traditional enclosed open court, reproduced for the first and last time in the Ādinā mosque. And the next mosque in point of time in the series of the five at Gaud, the *Darāsbāri Masjid*,¹ combines the eastern verandah not with a square single-domed chamber, but with a main hall planned more or less on that of the Ādinā mosque, taking also some features from Zafar Khān's mosque. The *Darāsbāri* mosque was built only four years after the *Chāmkāti* mosque, in 884/1479, also during the reign of Yūsuf Shāh.² It is grievously in ruins, its entire roof having fallen down. But even what remains shows clearly the main hall and the corridor, the former measuring internally 99 feet 5 inches by 39 feet 9 inches, and the latter being 10 feet 7 inches broad. There were 6 towers at the six corners (four of the main hall, and two of the verandah), bases of which still exist. The hall is divided into three sections, the central nave (38'9" × 17'9") and two wings (37'4" × 38'9"), each of the latter being divided into three aisles

¹ See *supra*, p. 173.

² *Memoirs*, 76-77, Pl. III, also *J.A.S.B.*, 1895, 222-23; *A.S.R.*, XV, 76.

and three bays by two rows of stone pillars, and therefore each wing having been originally covered by nine domes. The roof above the nave might have been either barrel-shaped, as at the Ādinā mosque, or of the Bengali *chauchālā* type, as seen in some later structures.¹ At the north-west corner of the northern wing the stone pillars are massive, suggesting the existence of an internal second storey, like that in the Ādinā mosque, most probably for the purpose of the *madrasa* and the library. There are 9 highly decorated *mihrābs* in the western wall, three in each section; but in the eastern wall there are only 7 doorways, the middle one opening to the nave being larger than the other. The arches rested on massive brick piers, like those in Zafar Khān's mosque. The corridor appears to have had 7 domes above it, the middle one being different in shape than the three on either side. The plan of the main hall, many of the decorative motifs, and even the ornamental false tympanums over the *mihrābs* are taken from the Ādinā mosque; but the *Darāsbāri* mosque is better proportioned and its terracotta ornamentation is "distributed over the various parts of the building so as to enhance their beauty in detail."²

In richness of decoration the *Darāsbāri* mosque is a forerunner of the Tantipara mosque, the third in the series, which was built a year afterwards in 885/1480 by one Mirsad Khān.³ It is designed however on the earlier multi-domed and oblong type, but with better proportions. Externally 91 feet by 43½ feet, its walls are 6½ feet thick and has four octagonal corner towers. The interior is divided into two aisles and five bays by a row of four square pillars which support the arches and squinches holding the 10 domes above. There are five doors in the eastern wall and in line with them five *mihrābs* in the western wall. Corresponding with the aisles there are also two doors on each of the northern and southern sides. All the ten domes and a part of the front wall have now fallen down. The cornice and the battlements

¹ The barrel shape is suggested by 'Ābid 'Alī Khān (*Memoirs*, 77) and S.K. Saraswati (*op.cit.*, 19). The *chauchala* shape is suggested by Dr. Dani (*op.cit.*, 110).

² Dani, *op.cit.*, 111.

³ *Memoirs*, 72.

are gently carved, while a line of moulding runs horizontally through the middle of the walls connecting the doors. The facade is decorated with large scroll-bordered panels containing pointed archs with the usual floreate motif hanging from the apex. The corner towers are similarly ornamented. "In the matter of ornament, indeed, the Tantipara masjid marks the zenith of the Bengal school."¹ It is "the finest of all buildings now remaining at Gaur."²

Of the two remaining mosques in the series, at Dhuniachak and Khāniadīghi respectively, the former is utterly ruined, portions only of the north and west walls, with three dilapidated *mihrābs*, now existing. The Khāniadīghi mosque is built on the model of the *Chāmkāti* mosque, having a 28 feet square chamber with a single dome resting on eight pillars placed at the angles of the notional octagon inside the square, and an eastern corridor covered by three hemispherical domes corresponding with three doreways on the eastern face. "We have here three rows of decoration between the cornice mouldings-- the chain at the lower and a series of niches with flowers in the upper two-- the same system of decoration as seen for the first time in the Eklākhi mausoleum."³

The seventh monument in the series, the tower, is known as the *Firūz Minār*, most probably after its builder Saif al-Dīn Firūz, the Abyssinian ruler (892-895/1486-1489), who constructed also a mosque, no longer in existence, and a tank.⁴ The *minār* stands beside the tank, on an earthen mound over which a flight of steps lead to the entrance of the west side (Pl. XXIII). At its base the tower is about 62 feet in circumference. It is about 84 feet high, divided into five storeys, the first three being 12 sided and equal to one another in diameter and each demarcated by ornamental bands from the other. The fourth and fifth storeys are marked off by a stone *chhajja*, are circular in shape and are gradually less in diameter. An internal spiral staircase from the entrance leads upto

¹ C.H.I., III., 605.

² Cunningham, *op.cit.*, 62.

³ Dani, *op.cit.*, 112.

⁴ *Rivād*, 125.

the top. At each storey there is a doorway on the west side in line with the entrance at the base of the tower. The facets are panelled and decorated with hanging motifs. The top was originally "an arched room covered by a dome", but it has been changed into an open flat roof by modern restoration. "The idea of this victory tower is no doubt derived from the *Qutb Minār* of Delhi", as Dr. Dani observes, "but unlike the latter, the lower three storeys of the Bengal minār are 12 sided, and instead of the angular and circular flutes of the *Qutb minār*, here we have the usual chain-and-bell motif.... Rightly speaking, it is the Bengali version of the *Qutb minār*."¹

(B) ILYĀS SHAHĪ MONUMENTS OUTSIDE GAUD

Outside Gaud there are a number of architectural monuments in the interior districts which belong to this period. Of these the buildings situated in Khulna and Barisal districts form a noteworthy group having some peculiar features; the rest in other districts follow more or less the same styles as noted above. Of this latter the smaller mosque at Chhota Pandua in the Hugli district, near Shah Ṣafī al-Dīn's tomb, built in 882/1477, and the mosque at Mulla Simla in the Serampore subdivision of the same district,² represent the square single-domed type with the significant improvement that at both these structures no pillar is used to support the dome. The same type with the addition of an eastern corridor is seen in the Gopalganj mosque in Dinajpur district, built on 16 Ṣafar, 865/1 December, 1460. The oblong multi-domed type, in which the interior is divided into aisles and bays by rows of pillars, the number of domes equalling the number of aisles into bays, and the number of *mihrābs* in the west wall being the same as the number of doors in the east wall, is represented by (a) Majlis Ṣāhib's mosque at Kalna in Burdwan district (date of construction not certain)³, (b) the Salik mosque at

¹ Dani, *op.cit.*, 115.

² Blochmann thinks, on the basis of an inscription found near the mosque, that it was built in 777/1375 (*J.A.S.B.*, 1870, 292); but considering its style M.M. Chakravarty (*J.A.S.B.*, 1910, 26) and following him Dr. Dani (*op.cit.*, 49-50, 154) think that the mosque belong to the later Ilyās Shāhī period.

³ S.K. Saraswati rightly assigns the mosque to this period on the ground that its name appears to have been "associated with the 'Great and Liberal Majlis, Majlais-i-A'zam' mentioned in the inscriptions of the Salik mosque at Bashirhat (871 H, 1466-67 A.D.) and the square mosque at =

Bashirhat in the Twentyfour Parganas district, built in 871/1466-67, and (c) Bābā Ādam's mosque at Rampal, in Dacca district, constructed in 888/1483. One noteworthy feature of the last named mosque (Pl. XXIV) is that instead of the side openings corresponding with the number of aisles (in this case two) there are only two deep rectangular niches in each of the northern and southern sides.

The style of the structures in Khulna and Barisal districts was much influenced by the personality and taste of "the Great Khān" (Khān al-A'zam) Khān Jahān, the celebrated governor of south Bengal¹ who was responsible for the construction of most of them and whose tomb exists at Begerhat. He appears to have a liking for the Tughlaq architectural style of Delhi so that the buildings erected at his instance show an adaptation of some features of the latter with the local style. It might have been that a number of Delhi artisans and masons of the Tughlaqian tradition had found their way into Bengal and had received employment with Khān Jahān. The inscription on his tomb records that he died on 26 Dhu-al-Hijja 863/23 October 1459.² The tomb itself is a good example of the style of construction he brought into being in south Bengal. It is a brick-built single-domed square structure, measuring 45 feet each side, with circular corner towers like those in the Tughlaq buildings, divided into sections by fine mouldings (Pl. XXV). There is a door on each of the northern, eastern and southern sides, and the interior is also a square without any pillars. Instead of them, stone brackets have been used in the corners to support the squinches which hold the hemispherical dome above. The battlements and cornice curve gently, but the whole facade is plain without any plaster or terracotta decoration. "The tomb, in its arch and lintel construction, recalls the Fīrūzian type of Delhi, and in its stark simplicity has again something of the bareness that is associated with Tughlaq architecture. The other features are typically local."³

= Chhota Panduah (882 H, 1477 A.D.), and might have been dated about this period". (*J.I.S.O.A.*, 1941, 26).

¹ See *supra*, pp. 165-167, 707-708.

² *J.A.S.B.*, 1867, 135.

³ Dr. Dani, *op.cit.*, 144.

By far the most important architectural monument associated with Khān Jahān's name is the magnificent mosque three miles to the south-west of his tomb. Popularly known as the Shāt Gumbad (Sixty domed) Masjid, it has in fact seventy-seven domes (Pls. XXVI-XXVII). It is the largest pre-modern mosque in present Bangladesh, measuring 160 feet by 108 feet. In its general plan it follows the usual multi-domed oblong type. The interior is divided into seven longitudinal aisles and 11 bays by six rows of 10 pillars each, most of which are of stone. The central bay is wider than the rest, as first seen in the Ādinā mosque; but instead of a single dome or vault over it, the "nave" at the Bagerhat mosque has seven Bengal *chauchālā* type of domes over its seven sections. The other seventy domes, 35 on each wing, are hemispherical. As usual, there are 11 doors in the frontage, the central one being wider, and 7 on each of the northern and eastern sides. The western wall has 11 *mihrābs* (the space of one being taken for an opening to the west), the central one being larger and flanked by a pulpit. There are four circular and tapering corner towers, with cupolas on top of them. The two front towers have internal spiral staircases leading to an open arched chamber on each of them. The battlements and cornice are carved, with a peculiar triangular pediment at the centre of the eastern side. The facade is bare and without any decoration. The numberless domes supported on arcaded aisles, as Dr. Dani observes, "recalls the Khirki and Kalan masjids of Delhi, that were erected during the reign of Fīrūz Shah Tughlaq. The tapering corner circular towers, very prominent in the Tughlaq architecture of Delhi, prove beyond doubt that the idea of such a mosque as well as some of its features must have been derived from the Tughlaq style."¹

To the same hand and style belongs the nine-domed mosque with 6 feet thick walls at Masjidkur in the Satkhira sub-division of Khulna district.² Three other mosques, situated respectively at Sailkupa in Jessore district, and Qaşba and Masjidbāri in Barisal district, belong to the Khān Jahānī style, though they were built by different persons. The mosque at Sailkupa (also called

¹ Dr. Dani, *op.cit.*, 146-147.

² J. Westland, *A Report on the district of Jessore*, Calcutta, 1871, 20-21.

Mirzāganj) is six-domed¹ and that at Qasba is nine-domed. The latter is generally believed to have been built early in the sixteenth century, but its affinity with Khān Jahān's style is unmistakable. The Masjidbāri mosque is a single domed square structure with massive and undecorated walls. It was built by Khān Mu'azzam Azyāl Khān in 870/1465.²

VI. ARCHITECTURAL DEVELOPMENTS IN THE HUSAIN SHĀHĪ PERIOD

No remarkably new style was set during the Husain Shāhī period, the patterns of building developed during the previous periods, specially that of the later Ilyās Shāhīs, being continued in this period also. Three aspects of the building activities of the Husain Shāhīs may however be noted. In the first place, a greater number of buildings were erected throughout the country, including parts of Assam and Bihar, which undoubtedly reflect the prosperity and patronage of the rulers. Secondly, there was a greater emphasis on ornamentation, particularly in the use of glazed tiles. Thirdly, there was a sort of revival of the use of stone as covering of both faces of the brick wall so that we notice in this period two types of structures, those built of bricks alone and those with stone-facing on the walls. There was also a revival of the stone-carving art, though it was not of a high quality and was in general an imitation of terracotta designs on stone. As with those of the Ilyās Shāhī period, the buildings of the Husainī period also may be divided into two broad categories in respect of sites, those situated in the capital Gaud, and those at other places in the interior districts.

Of the metropolitan Husain Shāhī monuments there are at least six of which the construction dates are definitely known from inscriptions *in situ*; and two others, the Lattan Masjid and the Gunamant Masjid, of which the dates are not definitely known but of which the style clearly places them in this period. The earliest of this series seems to be the *Chhota Sonā* (small Golden) *Masjid* (Pl. XXVIII), so called by the people to distinguish it from the *Bara Sonā* (Great Golden) mosque built at a subsequent date.

¹ J. A. S. B., 1901, 15-28.

² S. Ahmed, *Inscriptions*, 82-83.

The inscription on the *Chhota Sonā* mosque records that it was built during 'Alā' al-Dīn Husain Shāh's reign, but the portion mentioning the year is broken.¹ If, however, the Dā'ūd-kāndi (Tippera) mosque built in 906/1500 is taken to have been designed on the *Chhota Sonā* model, as is generally supposed by scholars, the latter must have been constructed before that year (1500 A.C.) and early in Husain Shāh's reign. The *Chhota Sonā* mosque sets the pattern of Husain Shāhī stone work and ornamentation. It received its present name, as Cunningham points out, "from the quality of gilding employed in its ornamentation, of which some still remains to justify the popular appellation."² The mosque is built in the brick-and-stone style, its brick walls having stone-facing on both the interior and exterior sides. In its ground plan the mosque is of the oblong multi-domed type, being externally 82 feet by 52 feet. Its interior is divided into three longitudinal aisles and five bays by two rows of four pillars each. The middle bay is larger, and is covered by three *chauchālā* type domes, while the remaining 12 domes, six on each wing, are hemispherical. Corresponding with the five bays there are five front doors, all equal in size (including the middle one representing the larger bay and unlike those of the Adīnā and Bagerhat Shāt Gumbad mosques), while the western wall has five *mihrābs*, the central one being larger than the rest. And in line with the three aisles there are three doors on each of the northern and southern sides. In the north-west corner there is an internal second storey forming most probably a ladies' gallery with an extra *mihrāb*. An entrance to this gallery is provided by an external staircase and platform from the northern side of the mosque. There are four octagonal corner towers, each with base and other mouldings dividing it into four sections. The back of the western wall has projection of the central *mihrāb* with corner turrets. The ornamental triple cornice and the parapet show a gentle curve. The facade is richly decorated, the designs being carved on stone. Each door is set within a rectangular frame containing a multicusped arch. The door frames are decorated with scroll work, except the central one which has

¹ *Memoirs*, 79-80.

² Cunningham, *op.cit.*, 73.

ornamented and vertical side panels tipped by the inscriptional tablet. The facade is further decorated by horizontal mouldings carried round the corner towers, carved panels being set along the lines of the mouldings. The facets of the corner towers also have similar panel decorations. The frames and interior of the *mihrābs* are similarly carved with floreate and other designs. On the whole the decorations of the *Chhota Sonā* mosque represent the best of the stone-cutter's art in the Husain Shāhi period (Pl. XXIXa).

The other variety of structures built completely of bricks is represented by the Gumti gate, erected by Husain Shāh in 918/1512 as an entrance into the citadel from the east. It is a single-domed square building, each side measuring 42 feet 8 inches, with four octagonal corner towers. The main arched passage through the building is east to west, and is 5 feet wide. The doorway is set within a rectangular frame, flanked by fluted and highly decorated turrets. The corner towers have all disappeared, except the bases, as also much of the ornamentations. Yet what remains shows that the structure was beautifully decorated with a profusion of glazed tiles, thus offering a striking contrast with the robust *Dākhil Darwāza* of the previous period. Another early structure built most probably by Husain Shāh is his tomb situated within the citadel. It is completely in ruins, the greater part of its materials, including the beautifully glazed blue and white tiles having been removed "by a Captain Adams, for the construction of some public works in Fort William."¹

Far more imposing and important is the *Bara Sona* (Great Golden) Mosque built at the instance of Nuṣrat Shāh in 932/1526 (Pl. XXX). It stands on the western side of a courtyard about 200 feet square, which has three arched gateways on its north, east and south sides. Each of the gateways was once faced with stone and decorated with designs of flowers worked out in glazed tiles of different colours. The mosque itself is of the oblong multi-domed type with a front corridor, measuring externally 168 feet by 76 feet including the corridor. The interior is divided into three longitudinal aisles and 11 bays by two rows of 10 pillars

¹ H. Beveridge in *J.A.S.B.*, 1894, 90.

each. All the bays are equal, as are also all the hemispherical 33 domes on the main hall and 11 domes on the corridor. The domes on the main hall have all collapsed, only those of the corridor are still standing. There are six octagonal towers at the six angles (4 of the main hall and 2 of the corridor). The entire facade is plain except for some mouldings and the cornice which, as well as the parapet, are gently curved. As usual, there are 11 openings on the east side of the corridor, to correspond with the 11 doors in the east wall of the main hall and the 11 *mihrābs* in its west wall. The northern and southern sides have each 4 openings, 3 in the main hall and 1 in the corridor. In the simple design and plain outlook the *Bara Sonā Masjid* has a grandeur of its own. According to Fergusson, it is "the finest memorial now left at Gaur."¹

The two remaining monuments of known dates are the Qadam Rasūl building in the eastern part of the citadel area, built in 937/1531 by Nuṣrat Shāh,² and the Jhanjhanīa Mosque built in 941/1535 by the last Husain Shāhī ruler Ghiyāth al-Dīn Maḥmūd Shāh.³ The former is a brick-built structure with a central square room measuring internally 19 feet each side, with 15 feet wide corridors on the north, east and south sides and four octagonal corner towers. The corridors are vaulted, while the central room is covered by a single dome with a lotus finial. The central room has a door on each of the northern, eastern and southern sides; and the corridor has one door each on the northern and the southern side, in line with those of the central room, and three doors in the middle of the eastern side, resting on short octagonal pillars. The battlements and cornice have the usual gentle curve. The eastern facade is profusely decorated, especially with terracotta panels at the northern and the southern ends. The corner towers are also decorated. The building is a peculiar one in that it is neither a mosque nor a public hall and its exact purpose is not known. Later traditions say that it was built for the preservation of a stone containing the foot-prints of the Prophet.⁴

¹ Fergusson, *op.cit.*, 257.

² *J.A.S.B.*, 1872, 338; *Mdmairs*, 61-62.

³ *J.A.S.B.*, 1872, 339; *Memoirs*, 93.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 63-64; *B.G.I.*, 145-146.

The Jhanjhanīa Mosque is also a brick-built structure. It is of the usual oblong and multi-domed type, 56 feet long by 42 feet wide, with octagonal corner towers. The interior is divided into two aisles and three bays by a row of pillars and covered as usual by six domes. There are two doors on each of the northern and the southern side, and three in the eastern wall, and correspondingly three *mihrābs* in the western wall. The battlements and triple cornice are slightly curved. The facade is highly decorated, the elevation being divided into four sections by bands of horizontal mouldings, and each of these sections is fitted with terracotta panels, as in the Qadam Rasūl building. Two novel features of the Jhanjhanīa Mosque are the pinnacles over the corner towers and the lotus finials over the domes; but it is difficult to say, as Dr. Dani points out, whether they are original or later additions.¹

The two structures of uncertain dates but stylistically belonging to this period are, as indicated above, the Lattan mosque and the Gunamant Mosque. The former is built on almost the same plan as the *Chāmkāti* mosque, being a single-domed square building with a vaulted front corridor, and measuring externally, inclusive of the corridor, 72 feet by 51 feet. There are three doors on each of the northern, eastern and southern sides of the main hall, matched by three *mihrābs* in the western wall. The verandah has three openings in the east, corresponding with the three of the main hall, and one on each of the northern and southern sides. The corridor is vaulted by three domes, the middle one being of the Bengali *chauchālā* type, and the two side ones being hemispherical. The main hall has one hemispherical dome above it. There are six towers at six angles of the structure, each tower being divided by decorative mouldings into three sections, each of which is ornamented with round flutes. The battlements and cornice are gently curved, while the back of the western wall has projections of the *mihrābs*. "The whole surface of the masjid, both inside and outside, was once covered with glazed tiles in various patterns of four colours,

¹ Dani, *op.cit.*, 125.

green, yellow, blue and white, the pattern being formed of hexagons, touching at the angles. Nearly the whole of the outer glazing has fallen off, but the interior glazing is still in fair order..."¹ One new feature of the Lattan mosque is that its dome has a low shoulder decorated with blind merlons.

The Gunamant Mosque is situated near the Mahdipur village, about half a mile to the west of the Lattan mosque. It is a brick-and-stone construction. It is of the oblong multi-domed type, 157 feet by 59 feet² combined with four octagonal corner towers, bases of which are now extant. The interior is divided into three sections by a central nave and two wings. The nave is roofed by a barrel vault, resting on massive stone piers. There is also a window in the vault in the east, to allow light inside it and to "bring to the view the profusely decorated terracotta work in the interior of the brick vault as well as the imitation of this work on stone."³ The two wings are each divided into three aisles by stone pillars and covered by nine hemispherical domes. The walls were originally faced with stone and decorated with glazed tiles. Most of these have now been removed.

Of the mufassal mosques erected during the Husain Shāhī period the more important ones are: (1) the Kheraul mosque in Murshidabad district, erected in 990/1494;⁴ (2) Rukn Khān's mosque at Deokot, Dinajpur district, erected in 918/1512;⁵ (3) a number of single-domed mosques at Sunārgāon, Dacca district, of which the one near Shāh Dānishmand's tomb was built in 929/1522; (4) the Hetamabad mosque in Dinajpur district, erected in 906/1500-01; (5) the Bara Goali mosque near Dā'ūd-kandī in Tippera district, built in 906/1500; (6) the Sankarpāsā mosque in Sylhet district (date uncertain); (7) the Pātharāil mosque in Faridpur district (date uncertain); (8) the Bāghā mosque in Rajshahi district, built in 930/1523 by Nuṣrat Shāh; (9) the Navagram mosque in Pabna district, built during the same reign in 932/1526; (10) the Sāhzādpur mosque in Pabna district; (11)

¹ Cunningham, *op.cit.*, 63.

² According to Stapleton's measurement, *Memoirs*, 86, n.1.

³ Dani, *op.cit.*, 123.

⁴ *J.A.S.B.*, 1873, 284.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 1872, 106; *E.I.M.*, 1929-30, 12-13.

Jalāl al-Dīn's mosque at Sātgaon, Hugli, built in 936/1529; (12) the Sura mosque in Dinajpur district (date uncertain); (13) The Kusumba mosque in Rajshahi district built in 966/1558 during the reign of the Afghan ruler Ghiyāth al-Dīn Bahādur Shāh and (14) the Quṭb mosque at Ashtagrām, Mymensingh district. Of these mosques Nos. 4 and 5, more particularly the latter, "is an exact replica of the Chhoti Sonā masjid in plan and other arrangements, though it is entirely of brick."¹ Nos. 9 and 12 follow closely the design and decoration of the Lattan mosque at Gaud. Of the rest, some features of only Nos. 8 and 13 are noted below.

The Bagha mosque² in Rajshahi district stands within an enclosed compound which has two arched gateways, one in the north and the other in the east. The mosque is brick-built, oblong in plan measuring 75 feet 8 inches by 42 feet 2 inches, with four octagonal corner towers (Pl. XXXI). Its interior is divided into two aisles and five bays by a row of 4 stone pillars above which stood 10 domes which have now fallen. There are five arched doorways in the eastern wall, and two each in the northern and southern sides. In the western wall are three *mihrābs* in the three southern bays, a panelled design in the fourth, and a smaller *mihrāb* in the internal second storey in the fifth, suggesting that there was most probably a ladies' gallery at the north-western section of the mosque. The *mihrābs* are ornamented with terracotta art. The battlements and the cornice are gently curved. The facade and the corner towers are decorated with horizontal mouldings and panels bordered with floreate designs.

The Kusumba mosque³ in the same district was built, as already mentioned, during the Afghan period; but it shows a continuation of the Husain Shāhī style (Pl. XXXII). It is built in the brick-and-stone style, the brick walls being faced with stones on both sides. It is of the usual oblong type, 58 feet by 42 feet, with octagonal corner towers. The interior is divided into 2 aisles and three bays by stone pillars, which support 6 hemispherical domes above. The eastern wall has three multi-cusped arched

¹ *J.I.S.O.A.*, 1941, 27-28.

² See the inscription in *J.A.S.B.*, 1904, 111.

³ See the inscription in *ibid.*, 108-109.

doorways and correspondingly the western wall has three *mihrābs*. There are two doorways each on the northern and eastern sides. The battlements and triple cornice are curved. The facade and the corner towers are decorated with horizontal mouldings and a series of double panels in between the mouldings and alternating with the doors. On the whole the mosque represents the Ḥusain Shāhī style with visible decline in design and stone-work.

VII: BUILDINGS OF THE MUGHAL PERIOD

(A) EARLY STRUCTURES

The Mughals introduced a number of important architectural features in Bengal. These came gradually; meanwhile the earlier style and features persisted for sometime longer. A notable example of this continued local style is the Qutb Shāhī mosque at Ḥaḍrat Pandua, built in 990/1582 by Makhdūm Shaikh, a descendant of Shaikh Nūr Qutb al-‘Ālam, in whose honour the mosque is so called¹ (Pl. XXXIII). It is built of bricks with roughly cut stone facings on the walls, and follows the usual oblong plan, measuring externally 82 feet 6 inches by 37 feet 8 inches and having corner towers crowned with cupolas. The interior is divided into 2 aisles and five bays by a row of four stone pillars that originally supported 10 domes, now all fallen. Corresponding with the aisles and bays respectively there are two arched doors each on the northern and the southern side, and five arched doors in the eastern wall in line with five *mihrābs* in the western wall. The parapet and cornice are curved. The facade is plain except for the bands of mouldings on the walls and the corner towers. There is practically no other decoration which offers a striking contrast with the emphasis on decoration noticed in the early Ḥusain Shāhī structures.

The approaching change in style is heralded however by the Kherua mosque at Sherpur, Bogra (Pl. XXXIV). Sherpur was a stronghold of the rebellious Qāqshāls during Akbar's reign. The mosque was built by one of the Qāqshāl leaders, Mirzā Murād Khān, son of Jauhar ‘Alī Khān Qāqshāl, on 25 Dhu al-Ḥijja 989/20

¹ *Memoirs*, 120-121.

January 1582.¹ It is oblong in ground plan, being 57 feet by 24 feet 6 inches; but it differs from the previous types in that its interior is kept a single hall, without the use of any pillar, and yet it is divided into three square sections, for the purpose of constructing the three hemispherical domes above, by means of two lateral arches spanning the east and west walls and the "phase of transition" is achieved by oversailing courses of bricks. In the east wall there are three arched openings in rectangular frames, and in the west three semi-circular *mihrābs* within similar frames. There is also one arched opening each in the northern and southern sides. In other respects the mosque retains the earlier features -- massive octagonal corner towers and curved cornice and battlements. The facade is almost bare except for a band of horizontal moulding round the middle of the walls, and vertical panels between the doorways. The upper panels flanking the middle doorway contain the inscriptional tablets. The Kherua mosque may be said to have set the pattern for the many three-domed but pillarless mosques built in Bengal during the Mughal period.

Closely following the Kherua mosque in point of time comes the *Jāmi'* mosque near Rajmahal built in 1592 at the instance of the Mughal viceroy Rājā Mānsingh.² It is oblong in plan, measuring 188 feet by 60 feet; but it introduces for the first time in Bengal a tall fronton flanked by slender minarets in the middle of the eastern facade. In this respect, as well as in its screen of arches with battlemented parapets the Rajmahal *Jāmi'* mosque tries to copy, as Dr. Dani points out, the *Jāmi'* mosque at Fatchpur Sikri.³ The local influence persists, however, in the octagonal corner towers and the multiplicity of domes covering the roof. The tall and projected fronton bordered by ornamental and slender minarets is repeated with a three-domed type in the *Jāmi'* mosque at old Malda, built four years afterwards in 1004/1596. It is 72 feet by 27 feet with the usual octagonal corner towers. The fronton contains a small multi-cusped arched doorway and is overlooked

¹ S. Ahmad, "Two inscriptions from Sherpur, Bogra District, Bengal", *E.I.M.*, 1937-38, 17-22.

² Martin's *Eastern India*, II, 77.

³ Dani, *op.cit.*, 267.

by a high and ribbed barrel vault in the middle of the roof. On two sides of this middle vault are two low squat and ribbed domes crowned with lotus finials. In line with these two domes are two more doorways in the east wall, one on either side of the fronton. There are three decorated *mihrābs* in the western wall. The interior of the mosque is divided into three sections by lateral arches, as in the Kherua mosque; but the central section is rectangular (22 feet by 18 feet) which is covered by the middle barrel vault. The two side-sections are each 16 feet square which hold the low squat domes. The battlements and cornice are gently curved, but in the front they are divided into three sections because of the fronton. The back of the west has the *mihrāb* projection bordered by ornamental minarets. The fronton with the ornamental minarets, the squat shaped low domes crowned with lotus finials, and also the plastering of the walls are the new features, along with the three-domed type without the internal pillars, introduced into Bengal towards the close of the sixteenth century (Pl. XXXV)

Two other early Mughal structures are there at old Malda. These are a *Kātra* or caravansarai and a tower. The *Kātra* stands near the river, a little to the north of the *Jāmi'* mosque. The *Kātrā* is simple in its plan. It consists of a quadrangular courtyard enclosed by residential rooms with an outer surrounding wall. There are two arched gateways, one each in the north and the south. It was evidently used as a resting place for travellers and traders. "Its design and workmanship are very similar to those of Akbar's caravansarai at Fathpur Sikri, and therefore it was very likely constructed towards the close of the 16th century A.D."¹ The tower (Pl. XXXVI) stands at the confluence of the Kalindri and Mahananda rivers and is called the *Nīmsarāi Minār* most probably because of its situation exactly midway (*Nīm* or half) between Pandua and Gaud.² It is also very much similar to Akbar's *Hiran Minār* at Fatehpur Sikri, both being octagonal at the basement and the walls of both being similarly studded with projecting imitation elephant-tasks made of stone. Hence it has been very

¹ Dani, *op.cit.*, 171.

² *Memoirs*, 154.

reasonably supposed that the Bengal *minār* was inspired by the Fathpur prototype and was built about the same time (end of the 16th century).¹ The *Nīmsarāi Minār* is 18 feet and 9 inches in diameter above the basement, tapering upwards. Only two of its storeys reaching a height of about 60 feet are now in existence. There is an internal spiral staircase leading to the top.

(B) MUGHAL MONUMENTS AT DACCA

With the completion of Mughal conquest of Bengal and the establishment of the provincial capital at Dacca by Islām Khān there began a new phase of architectuaral activities there. For nearly a century Dacca remained the Mughal provincial capital. During this long period a fairly large number of buildings were erected for administrative, military, religious and other purposes. Many of those buildings comprising *kātrās*, forts, bridges, mosques and tombs are still in a fair state of existence in and around the city. The earliest extant structure is the *Bara Kātrā* (the Great Caravansarai), situated on the eastern bank of the river near the old city-centre, the *Chawk*. It is a "stupendous pile of grand and beautiful architecture" which, according to tradition, was originally built as a palace for the viceroy, Prince Shujā' who, "not being satisfied with it even as a temporary residence for himself," bestowed it on Mīr Abū al-Qāsim, the officer who superintended its erection; and that "it was afterwards appropriated to the accommodation of travelling merchants and strangers."² This, as D'Oylie points out, does not entirely agree with the inscription found on it which runs as follows:³

"Sultan Shah Suja was employed in the performance of charitable acts. Therefore Aboo ul Kasim Tubba Tubba Hasseince Ulsumnance [Abū al-Qasim Ṭabā Ṭabā'ī Husaini al-Simnānī], in the hopes of the mercy of God, erected this building of auspicious structure, together with twenty-two dookans, or shops, adjoining, to the end that the profits arising from them be solely appropriated by the agents and overseers to their repairs, and the necessities of the indigent, who on their arrival are to be accommodated with lodgings free of expense. And this condition is not to be violated, lest on the day of retribution the violator be punished.

¹ Dani, *op.cit.*, 173.

² D'Oylie, *Antiquities of Dacca* (Published by J. Lindsay, London, 1825?), No. 3, 9.

³ *Ibid.*

This inscription was written by Saadoodeen Mahommud Sherazee [Sa'd al-Dīn Muḥammad Shīrāzī], An. Hegira, 1055."

Thus according to the inscription the *Bara Kātrā* has been from the beginning a caravansarai, though, considering the length of time which must have been taken for the erection of so large a structure it might be supposed that it had been originally planned as a palace but finished as a caravansarai.¹ As originally built the *Bara Kātrā* enclosed a quadrangular courtyard with two storeys of living rooms on all sides and having two magnificent gateways, one in the north and the other in the southern side, and four octagonal corner towers. Only the southern block with the gateway facing the river now exists. This wing is about 223 feet long, in the centre of which is the strongly built three storeyed gateway. The gateway is octagonal in plan with a projected fronton containing a high alcove and flanked by tall and slender minarets. The facade is decorated with plastered panels with a variety of arches. The main arched doorway leads to a guardroom and then through two successive archways into an octagonal and domed hall of which the ceiling is decorated with plastered network and other designs. Beyond this hall a similar series of archways lead to the innerside of the *Kātrā*. By the left and right side of the gateway in the innerside two staircases are provided for going to the upper storeys. The upper part of the gateway consists of living rooms, while on the lower side of it is a row of five barrel-vaulted rooms on the ground floor and five living rooms with a continuous corridor on the first floor. The corner towers are hollow and approachable. About 200 yards to the east of the *Bara Kātrā* is another caravansarai, called the *Chhota Kātrā*. It was built at a later date, in 1664, by Shāista Khān. It is similar in plan to the *Bara Kātrā*, but smaller in size. The *Chhota Kātrā* has almost lost its original identity by later additions and modern encroachments.

Another monument of Prince Shujā's time is the Churihāttā mosque, so called after the locality in which it is situated near the *Chawk*. It was built about five years after the *Bara Kātrā*, in 1649,

¹ Aulad Husain (*Notes on the Antiquities of Dacca*, 15-16) states that the building was constructed in 1053 and bestowed on Abū al-Qāsim in 1055/1645-46.

by an officer named Muḥammad Beg. It is rectangular in plan with corner towers but it is covered by a vaulted pyramidal roof. It has three front doors, each opening through two successive arches. The facade is decorated with rectangular and square panels. The cornice is straight and faced with blind merlons.

Not many other buildings of Shujā's time, nor indeed of the first half of the seventeenth century, are found in Dacca. One reason for this is that Prince Shujā' did not stay in Dacca but, as noted earlier, at Rajmahal so that the former place did not receive that much of attention till the accession of Aurangzeb to the Delhi throne. Shujā' had, however, some noble structures erected at Rajmahal and Gaud. At the former place he had a magnificent palace complex built for him. It consisted of a *Dīwān-i-Ām*, a *Dīwān-i-Khāṣ*, a pleasure lake called *Ānand Sarowar*, three other specious and decorated buildings called the *Sang-i-Dālān*, the *Māchhi Bhavan* and the *Hāvelī*, besides the viceregal residence with *ḥammāms* and water reservoirs.¹ Unfortunately much of these monuments are in ruins now. At Gaud also Shujā' caused the erection of some notable buildings. It is even said that he endeavoured to revive the glory of that city.² One of the structures erected there at his instance is the Eastern Gate of the citadel. It is a three-storeyed building with a broad facade measuring 65 feet in the middle of which the archway opens under a high half-dome. Two other monuments are the tomb and mosque of Shāh Ni'mat Allah. The tomb is built on a raised platform. It is a 53 feet square building with four octagonal corner towers, each having a ribbed cupola and a tall finial. The structure consists of a central square tomb chamber roofed by a slightly bulbous dome, surrounded by corridors on all the four sides. These are roofed by flat vaults, but the underceiling at the corners is domical, and at the sides, barrel-shaped. The parapet is horizontal and battlemented. Architecturally the structure is important as foreshadowing the plan of Bibi Mariam's tomb at Narayanganj and, to some extent, that of Bibi Pari's tomb in the

¹ *Martin's Eastern India*, II, 70-76.

² *Memoirs*, 64.

Lalbagh fort at Dacca¹ Adjoining Shāh Ni'mat Allah's tomb is the mosque which also goes by his name and which was erected either by him or in his memory by Prince Shujā'. The mosque stands on the western side of a courtyard enclosed by arcaded walls. It is of the three-domed oblong type, measuring 63 feet and 6 inches long by 24 feet and 9 inches broad, with four corner towers that are octagonal upto the parapet and circular above it (Pl. XXXVII). The central dome is larger than the two side ones and, correspondingly, the central of the three arched front doorways is larger than the two others and is set within a slightly projected frame. This frame as well as the other parts of the facade are decorated with panels. The parapet is horizontal and battlemented. The interior of the central dome and the pendentives are ornamented with plastered designs.

Dacca regained its full position as the viceregal seat with the accession of Aurangzeb, more particularly with the arrival there of his viceroy Mīr Jumla. Of the Mughal monuments at Dacca belonging to the later part of the seventeenth and the early years of the eighteenth century the most important ones are (a) the fort and mosque at Lālbāgh, including Bibi Pari's tomb; (b) the mosque and tomb of Hājī Khwāja Shāhbāz situated behind the present High Court building; (c) the *Sātgumbad* mosque near the present Muhammadpur colony and (d) Kārtalab Khān's mosque at Begambazar. The Lālbāgh Fort stands on the bank of the river Buriganga; but it is not a river or water-fort. It was originally planned as a palace fortress by Prince Muhammad A'zam when he was viceroy in Bengal in 1678-79, but it was never completed. At the present day only its western and southern walls, with a gateway in the south-east corner and the remnants of two gateways on the northern side exist. The southern wall facing the river has a number of octagonal bastions projecting beyond the wall. The innerside of the southern wall is filled with earth upto the rampart level. Towards the west of the earth-filling is an underground way providing access to the interior of the wall and other bastions. Architecturally the most important part is the

¹ *Infra*, p. 917.

south-eastern gateway (Pl. XXXVIII). It is designed "in the true Mughal style complete by itself. It was to be three storeyed in height when complete. The elevation retains all the embellishing features of a Mughal gateway. A lofty archway to the top of the second storey forms the nucleus of the elevation, which is emphasized by the slender octagonal minarets that shoot up on either side. Beyond on the right and the left are to be seen a deep plastered semi-octagonal alcove below and an oriel window in two stages above with a cupola as its crowning element. The last storey gave way to a further series of doorways and other embattlements and on the top over the four corners were to be seen pillared kiosks majestically breaking the skyline, two of which still remain."¹

Within the fort compound and on a raised platform stands the mosque, also built by Prince Muhammad A'zam (Pl. XXXIX). It is an oblong three-domed mosque, measuring externally 65 feet by 32½ feet with octagonal corner minars rising above the parapet and having plastered kiosks. Like Shāh Ni'mat Allah's mosque at Gaud the Lālbāgh mosque is also distinguished by its middle dome being larger than the two side ones. The domes are also all fluted and have basal leaf ornamentation and prominent finials. For the purpose of such an arrangement of the domes the interior of the mosque is divided into three unequal bays by lateral arches. The central bay is a large square holding the big middle dome above it, while the side bays are smaller in width but, for the purpose of constructing the smaller domes on them, they are reduced at the roof level to two smaller squares by means of half-domes constructed at the sides. The eastern wall of the mosque has three openings, the middle one being larger than the two side ones and, balancing with the larger middle dome, is set within a fronton bounded by engaged pinnacles. Each of the doors open under a half-dome the ceiling of which is decorated with rectangular panels containing multicusped arches. The parapet is horizontal, but raised at the central entrance and is faced with blind merlons. There are two other openings, one on the northern

¹ Dani, *op.cit.*, 223.

and the other on the southern side. The Lālbāgh mosque, together with Shāh Ni'mat Allah's mosque set the pattern for many subsequent three-domed mosques of which the central dome is larger, different methods being adopted to reduce the size of the side domes.

A little to the east of the mosque and almost at the middle of the fort compound stands on a raised platform the tomb of Pari Bibi, said to be a daughter of Shāista Khān's, who is also credited with having erected the structure (Pl. XL a). As already indicated, the tomb is planned more or less on the model of Shāh Ni'mat Allah's tomb, with a central square tomb chamber which is roofed by a false copper dome, and the side spaces instead of being kept as corridors, are formed into four square rooms at the four corners, and four rectangular side or passage-rooms. The whole structure is 60 feet square. Its facade looks almost that of the mosque, having three doorways under half-domes, the middle door being larger and contained within a projected fronton. The entire wall face and the facets of the corner towers are decorated with rectangular panels. Architecturally the structure is noteworthy in being the only building in which white marble has been used as wall facings and door screens. The floor of its central room is also laid out in patterns of black marble. The marble facings of the walls, except those of the central tomb chamber, are now gone. The ceiling of the side rooms is made of overlapping black basalt stone and the doorways are fitted with rectangular door jambs and lintels.

Hājī Shāhbāz Khān's mosque, along with his tomb, stand on an elevated ground behind the present High Court building. The mosque was built by the Hājī in 1089/1679 during Shāista Khān's viceroyalty. It is oblong in plan, measuring externally 68 feet by 28 feet, with four corner towers and three squat shouldered domes with finials (Pl. XLI). The interior is divided into three sections by two big multi-cusped lateral arches. The corner towers are octagonal upto the parapet and round above it, and have ribbed cupolas. Each of the towers is flanked by two subsidiary turrets. The facade has the usual three arched doorways, the middle one being larger and contained within the

projected fronton. The doorway is set within a stone arch-frame and bordered by two slender towers. On either side of the middle doorway there are five rows of three small niches each. The parapet is decorated with blind merlons, and the back of the western wall has projection of the central *mihrāb*, with a turret on either side.

The *Sātḡumbāḍ* (seven-domed) mosque also was built during Shāista Khān's viceroyalty. It stands off the present Sātmaṣjid road, so named after the mosque itself. It is essentially of the three-domed type, measuring externally 58 feet by 27 feet, but its corner towers are kept hollow and are crowned with small domes so that the mosque has in all seven domes (Pl. XLII). The interior is divided into three bays by two lateral arches, the central bay being larger and holding above it the larger dome. The side domes are smaller; and the reduction in their size is effected by the same process as at the Lālbāgh mosque. The eastern facade has the usual large arched entrance in the middle, set within a projected fronton bordered by two small *minārs* and flanked by two smaller doorways on the two sides. There is also the same panel decorations on the eastern facade, while the decorations at the parapet and at the bases of the domes are brought into a bolder relief by blue painting.

The Begambazar mosque, called Kartalab Khān's mosque after the name of its founder Kartalab Khān (later on Murshid Qulī Khān), is distinguished not simply because it was built by the last of the Mughal viceroys at Dacca, but also because it has some new features. The mosque itself is constructed on a terrace below which are a number of vaulted rooms used for various purposes (Pl. XLIII). Secondly, the mosque shows an extension of the principle of the three-domed type to build a five-domed one. Thus the interior is divided into a big central bay and two smaller ones on either side by four lateral arches. The central dome, as usual, is larger than the the four others, two on each side. The domes have basal leaf ornamentation and tall finials. The corner towers have arched kiosks and tall finials. The eastern facade has five arched doorways, the central one being larger than the others

and contained as usual within a projected fronton. A novel feature is that the doors are separated from one another by slender minārs rising above the battlemented parapet, which is also decorated with blind merlons. Lastly, the mosque has the peculiarity of having a *do-chālā* hut-roofed room attached to its north. Most probably it was used as residence for the *imām*.

Of the other Mughal architectural monuments in and around Dacca mention may be made of Khān Muḥammad Mirdhā's mosque, built in 1176/1706 (Pl. XLIV), Bibi Mariam's mosque (Pl. XL b) and tomb at Narayanganj built during Shāista Khān's viceroyalty, the Hajiganj and Sonakanda forts near Narayanganj, the Idrakpur fort at Munshiganj and a number of bridges at Dacca and its environs, all constructed during Islām Khān's and Mīr Jumla's time. Khān Muḥammad Mirdhā's and Bibi Mariam's mosques are both of the usual three-domed and oblong type. In the former the reduction in the size of the two side domes is achieved by an intermediary stage of pendentives; and in the latter it is done by thickening the side walls. The three forts named above are water-or river-side forts built for the purpose of checking the intrusion of the pirates, particularly the Arakanese and the Portuguese. The Hajiganj fort stands at the confluence of the Lakhya and the old Buriganga. It consists of a pentagonal curtain wall with round bastions at the angles and a small gateway towards the riverside. At one corner within the fort there is a tall brick-built column, used most probably for taking a far view or for firing long-range guns. The fort was probably built during Islām Khān's viceroyalty. The Sonakanda fort on the other side of the Lakhya where the river Brahmaputra formerly met it was built about the same time (Pl. XLV). It consists of a curtain wall with bastions at regular intervals, prominent merlons, an arched gateway opposite the riverside and an additional projection towards the riverside. The French traveller Travenier who visited Dacca in January 1666 writes about the fort as follows: "On the 13th [January, 1666] at noon we met a river at 2 coss [about 4 miles] from Dacca, called Laquia [Lakhya] which comes from the north-east. Opposite the point where the two rivers join, there is a

fortress with several guns on each side.”¹ The Idrakpur fort at Munshiganj was probably built by Mīr Jumla (Pl. XLVI). It stands on the old bank of the river Ichhāmati which has now receded. The fort consists of two parts, a wider open area enclosed by curtain walls with prominent merlons and bastions at the angles, and a high round platform enclosed by another curtain wall and approachable by a gateway from the former. The only other fort of the Mughal time of which there are still some remains is the present Central Jail in the city. Only the curtain walls around the Jail are remnants of the original fort, the inside structures are relatively modern. We also hear of some mud and riverside forts having been constructed early in the Mughal period;² but no trace of them now exists.

The Mughal viceroys had a number of bridges built over the canals and riveluts that intersected the city of Dacca as well as on some rivers that fell on the way to strategic places. Many of these bridges have now either disappeared or been dismantled in the course of modern developments. Of those which still continue to exist in some form or other, the bridge at Tongi and the Pāglā bridge midway between Dacca and Narayanganj are noteworthy. They were both constructed during Mīr Jumla’s time. The Pāglā bridge spanned a former course of the Dulai river. Tavernier describes it as “a fine brick bridge, which Mir Jumla ordered to be built.” He further writes: “half a coss below you find another [river] called Cadamtali, which comes from the north, and which you also cross by a brick-bridge...”³ This latter bridge is no longer in existence. These bridges were of camber type, built on arches. The Pāglā bridge also is now in ruins. It “consisted of three open arches, each arch being four-centered and stilted, and a further blind arch at either end. The spandrels of the arches are decorated with prominent rosettes and the base of the arches is provided with semi-circular cut-waters. But of grater importance are four octagonal hollow towers, one at each corner. These towers have multi-cusped arched openings and are further

¹ *Tavernier*, I., 104.

² *B.G.*, I, 56.

³ *Tavernier*, I., 104.

relieved with deep panels while a fluted dome [sic] crowns their heads. On the whole, even with the fallen towers, the romantic beauty of the architecture catches the eye."¹

(C) MONUMENTS AT OTHER PLACES

Besides the capital city and its neighbourhood, a large number of mosques and other buildings were constructed at other places also during the Mughal period. Some of the earlier ones of this local series naturally show such pre-Mughal features as curved parapets and brick decorations; but even then their Mughal character is emphasized by the style of their domes and the corner *minārs* which rise high above the parapets. Also these local mosques are more commonly single-domed, though examples of the three-domed type are not rare.

Perhaps the best examples of the single-domed type showing a combination of the Mughal with pre-Mughal features are a group of five brick-built mosques in the Kishoreganj subdivision of Mymensingh district. These are the Atia *Jāmi'* Mosque, the Sadi Mosque and Shāh Muḥammad's Mosque at Egarasindur, the Masjidpara Mosque and the Gurai Mosque. The Atia *Jāmi'* mosque was built in 1018/1609 by Sayyid Khān Pannī, son of Bāyazīd Khān Pannī. It consists of a single-domed square room with an eastern corridor covered by three domes, measuring in all 69 feet by 40 feet, and having on the four corners four massive octagonal towers, each crowned by a plastered kiosk and decorated with several horizontal mouldings. There are three arched doorways on the eastern side, each within a rectangular frame. The middle door is slightly larger than the side ones. The facade is divided into an upper and lower section, each of which is decorated with rectangular panels. The cornice and the parapet are deeply curved, the latter being also battlemented. The domes are all crowned with lotus finials and have battlemented shoulder drums and additional rows of basal ornamentation. "The mosque illustrates a happy combination of the Mughal elements with the pre-Mughal features."²

¹ Dani, *op.cit.*, 227.

² *Ibid.*, 213.

The Sadi Mosque at Egarasindur was built in 1062/1652. It is a square structure, 27 feet on each side, with four corner towers. The parapet and cornice are curved and there are terracotta decorations round the three front entrances. The three *mihrābs* in the western wall are also decorated. Shāh Muḥammad's mosque, also at Egarasindur, was most probably built in the last quarter of the seventeenth century. It is also square in ground plan, being 32 feet on each side, with four octagonal corner towers topped by plastered Kiosks (Pl. XLVII). All the five doorways, three in the front and 2 on the north and south sides, are set in slightly projected bays, each of which is bordered by ornamental minarets. The middle front door is larger than the rest and the facade is decorated with panelled niches, some with terracotta work. The parapet is horizontal and the dome rests on an octagonal shoulder drum and is crowned with a lotus finial. About four miles to the north-west of Egarasindur is Masjidpara which evidently derives its name from the *masjid* there. According to an inscription over its central doorway, the Masjidapara mosque (Pl. XLVIII) was built in 1080/1669. It is a 29 feet square single-domed mosque with octagonal corner towers rising above the parapets. The dome is slightly bulbous, crowned with a lotus finial, and has an ornamental cresting at the bulge. The parapets are horizontal and are decorated with merlons. There are three arched doorways on the eastern side, the middle one as usual being larger than the two others. The eastern facade is decorated with plastered arched panels, while the other faces have rectangular panels. The three *mihrābs* in the western wall are ornamented with plastered and terracotta designs. The last mosque in the series, that at Gurai, (Pl. XLIX) is similar in style with the Masjidpara mosque and was most probably built about the same time. It is also a single-domed square structure with four octagonal corner towers. The middle one of the three front arched doorways is larger and is set within a slightly projected rectangular frame bordered by faceted pillars. On either side of the central doorway there are terracotta panel decorations. The rest of the wall is also decorated with rectangular panels. The parapet and double cornice are horizontal and battlemented and

have two more pinnacles on each side. The dome stands on an octagonal drum and is ornamented with basal merlons and a lotus finial. The three *mihrābs* in the west wall are also decorated. There are two other doorways, one on the northern and the other on the southern side.

Both the single-domed and three-domed styles are represented by the Aurangzebi Mosque and Qadam Mubārak Mosque at Chittagong. The former, a single-domed one, is situated near the reputed tomb of Bāyazīd Bustāmī,¹ about four miles to the north of the town (Pl.L). It has three front doorways of which the central one is given prominence by a projected front flanked by fluted turrets. The dome has a lotus finial. The Qadam Mubārak Mosque is situated in the Rahmatganj locality of the town (Pl.LI). It was built in 1136/1719 by Muḥammad Yāsīn. It is a three-domed type to which are attached at a later date two rooms, one in the north and the other in the south end. These end-rooms are covered with segmented roofs.

The last phase of the building activities were naturally centered at Murshidabad where the provincial capital was shifted by Murshid Qulī Khān in 1703. Of the existing architectural monuments of his time there the most notable are the *Kātrā* and the mosque at the centre of its courtyard. These were built in 1723. The *Kātrā* consists of a row of double-storeyed living rooms enclosing a square courtyard, 166 feet on each side. There were four immense octagonal and tapering corner towers, "resembling Egyptian pylons in solidity," of which only two, one in the north-west and the other in the south-west are still standing. The *Kātrā* entrance is on the eastern side. Below that entrance is an under-cell where Murshid Qulī Khān lies buried. The mosque stands on a raised platform at the centre of the courtyard. It is rectangular in plan measuring about 130 feet by 24 feet, with octagonal corner towers, and is a copy of the mosque which Murshid Qulī Khān had earlier built at Dacca (Kartalab Khān's Mosque).² The *Kātrā* mosque has thus five domes and its interior

¹ The tomb is a fake one, as the local nineteenth century historian Hāmid Allah Khān points out.

² *Supra*, pp.918-919.

is a single room but divided into five sections by means of transverse arches springing from the side walls. On these five sections are rested the five domes. The eastern facade is richly panelled. Another monument is the Motijhil (Pearl-Lake) Palace, built in 1743 by Nawāzish Muḥammad Khān, 'Alīvardī Khān's eldest son-in-law. Of some architectural importance are also the two cemeteries, called *Khush-Bāgh* and *Raushnī-Bāgh* (Garden of Happiness and Garden of Light, respectively). The former lies about two miles south of the town and contains the tomb of 'Alīvardī Khān and probably also of Sirāj al-Daulah,¹ besides other members of the Nawwāb family. The *Raushnī-Bāgh* lies nearly opposite the Nawwāb's palace, on the other side of the river, and contains the tomb of Nawwāb Shujā' al-Dīn Muḥammad and some others, and also a mosque said to have been built by 'Alīvardī Khān.² Sirāj al-Daulah built, among other structures, a magnificent *Imāmbārah* and the Palace of Mansurganj. The latter has been washed away by the Bhagirathi river, while the former, the *Imāmbārah*, was completely burnt down by two successive fires, once in 1842 and again in 1846.³ The present *Imāmbārah* was built in 1846.⁴ Similarly the present palace building, which is the most conspicuous structure at Murshidabad, was built between 1829 and 1837 under European superintendence.

¹ L.S.S. O'Malley, *Bengal District Gazetteers, Murshidabad*, 215.

² J.H.T. Walsh, *A History of Murshidabad District*, London, 1902, 75.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

CHAPTER XXXIV GLIMPSES OF THE ECONOMIC CONDITION

During the Muslim rule Bengal attained a degree of prosperity unknown before or since. Its alluvial land, favoured by one of the most remarkable networks of rivers in the world and by an abundance of seasonal rainfalls, was exceedingly fertile. To this the Muslims added their energy and industry. They reclaimed and brought under cultivation vast tracts of virgin lands, made new settlements on them, established and improved various industries, and opened up trade with far-off countries in the east and the west. As a result the country grew within a short period to be one of the most prosperous lands in the then world. Its wealth and resources became proverbial and evoked the admiration of foreign observers. It was not without reason that an early fourteenth century ruler of the country, Shams al-Dīn Fīrūz Shāh (701-722/1303-1322), was described as "Inheritor of the Kingdom of Solomon" (وَأَرِثَ مَلِكَ سُلَيْمَانَ)¹ Nor was such prosperity limited to a particular period or century. It obtained uniformly for about five hundred years, from the fourteenth to the end of the eighteenth century. This is amply confirmed by the reports of the foreigners who visited the land from time to time over these centuries. The earliest clear reference to the country's prosperity is contained in the account of the celebrated traveller Ibn Baṭūṭa who visited east Bengal about 1340. As noted earlier,² he claimed it to be the wealthiest and cheapest country in the world, a "hell full of bounties" (*Dozakh pur-i-ni'amat*), as the people of Khurasam termed it. A Chinese account composed some ten years after Ibn Baṭūṭa's visit to Bengal also speaks similarly about its agricultural and commercial prosperity.³ Early in the following century several Chinese diplomatic missions came to Bengal. Ma-Huan, who came with the Chinese mission of 1415, observed that the country was extensive and its "wealth and prosperity abundant and great."⁴ Another account of the same mission adds: "Bengal

¹ Zafar Khān's tomb inscription at Tribeni, dated 1 Muharram, 713 (28 April 1313), *J.A.S.B.*, 1873, 287-88; *E.I.M.*, 1917-18, 33-34.

² *Supra*, pp. 130-132; see also *Rihla*, 610.

³ Wang Ta-yuan's account of 1349-50, *V.B.A.*, I., 1945, 99.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 117.

is rich and civilized. To our ambassador they presented gold basins, gold bowls and to our vice-ambassador the same articles in silver. To our officials of the ministry of foreign affairs they presented golden bells and long gowns with white hemp and silk. Our soldiers got silver coins. If they had not been rich how could they do it in such an extravagant way?"¹ About a hundred years afterwards the Venetian and Portuguese travellers Varthema and Barbosa visited Bengal (1505 and 1515). They are equally eloquent in their descriptions of the country's agricultural and commercial prosperity. In the middle of the sixteenth century the Mughal ruler Humāyūn captured Bengal's capital city Gaud for a short while. He was so impressed by its wealth, prosperity and greenery that he renamed it *Jannatābād*. During the later part of the sixteenth and throughout the seventeenth century a number of Europeans visited Bengal and noted its uncommon wealth and resources. In 1666, for instance, Bernier called it the "finest province in Hindoostan".² He further observed: "Egypt has been represented in every age as the finest and most fruitful country in the world, and even our modern writers deny that there is any other land so peculiarly favoured by nature: but the knowledge I have acquired of *Bengale*, during two visits paid to that kingdom, inclines me to believe that the preeminence ascribed to Egypt is rather due to *Bengale*." Then after having referred to its agricultural and industrial products the traveller states: "In a word, *Bengale* abounds with every necessary of life; and it is this abundance that has induced so many *Portuguese*, *Half-castes*, and other *Christians*, driven from their different settlements by the *Dutch*, to seek an asylum in this fertile kingdom". The exuberance of the country," together with other attractions "has given rise to a proverb in common use among the *Portuguese*, *English* and *Dutch*, that the kingdom of *Bengale* has a hundred gates open for entrance, but not one for departure."³ Indeed since the middle of the seventeenth century the European nations, specially the English and the Dutch, began to carry on an

¹ *Ibid.*, 127.

² *Bernier*, 169.

³ *Bernier*, 437, 438-39.

extensive trade with the country. The records of these nations, particularly those of the English abound in references to Bengal's wealth and resources. Thus it appears that Bengal enjoyed continued prosperity from at least the second century of Muslim rule till the end of the eighteenth century.

The economic progress of the country during this long period was brought about by as well as reflected through four main developments, namely (i) the introduction of a regular silver and gold coinage; (ii) reclamation of virgin lands and extension of agriculture; (iii) expansion of international trade backed by thriving industries, and (iv) growth of a large number of towns and trade centres. The main features of these developments, together with glimpses of the condition of the people in general, are briefly noted below.

I. GOLD AND SILVER COINAGE

The introduction of a regular gold and silver coinage simultaneously with the establishment of Muslim rule in Bengal attracts attention mainly for two reasons. In the first place, no such coinage had been in vogue in the land prior to the coming of the Muslims, specially in the period of the Senas, when all transactions were made in *cowries* or shells. The introduction of the new coinage was therefore in itself a revolutionary measure making a clear departure from the past. Secondly, when the Muslims came to Bengal international trade was largely in the hands of the Arabs, Persians and Turks who had already well established systems of gold and silver coinages. In introducing such a coinage in Bengal the new rulers seem not only to have imitated the other Muslim rulers but also to have intended to facilitate trade and commerce with them and the rest of the world. The issuing of coins was of course a well known practice for proclaiming one's sovereignty or succession; but its financial and monetary aspect was no less important. And judging from the expansion of Bengal's international trade during the period it might be said that by the introduction of a standard gold and silver coinage the country was brought into the orbit of international monetary standard of the time. It is noteworthy that the use of *cowries* was not abolished; it continued to be the

medium of day-to-day and small internal transactions; but for external as well as large-scale internal transactions gold and silver coins were used.

As already mentioned earlier, coins were issued by the founder of Muslim dominion in Bengal, Ikhtiyār al-Dīn Muḥammad bin Bakhtiyār Khaljī. The earliest clear reference to the use of gold coins, however, relates to Ghiyāth al-Dīn 'Iwāḍ Khaljī's time (608-624/1211-1226). During his rule a celebrated *'ālim* named Jalāl al-Dīn ibn Jamāl al-Dīn Ghaznawī visited the Bengal Sultān's court and was called upon to deliver a discourse in the audience hall. After the lecture, to quote Minhāj, "that sovereign of benevolent disposition, brought forth from his treasury a large chalice full of gold and silver *tangāhs*, and bestowed upon him a present of about two thousand *tangāhs*", and that the other *Malīks* and *Amīrs* also did so, so that about "three thousand gold and silver *tangāhs* more were obtained."¹ There are indeed many other references to the use of gold coins in day-to-day transactions. The remark of the Chinese observers that the Muslims of Bengal were true to their undertaking even if the transaction turned out to be unfavourable to them and involved "ten thousand pieces of gold" has already been noted.² Ibn Baṭūṭa mentions that slave girls were sold in Bengal at a gold dinār each and that he himself purchased one at that price.³ It may also be recalled that Ghiyāth al-Dīn A'zam Shāh (792-813/1390-1410) and Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad Shāh (818-135/1415-1431) sent thousands of gold coins to the holy cities of Makka and Madina for charitable purposes.⁴ Abū al-Faḍl mentions (1593) that the people of Bengal themselves brought "mohars (gold coins) and rupees to the appointed place" for paying the revenue.⁵ In the following century there are numerous references in the English East India Company's records to their bringing gold and silver bullion into Bengal and having that minted into gold and silver coins for the purpose of making "investments" and procuring goods for

¹ *Minhāj*, (tr.) I., 583-84.

² *Supra*, p. 795.

³ *Rihla*, 610.

⁴ *Supra*, pp. 142-145.

⁵ *Āīn*, II (tr.), 134.

shipment.¹ Thus throughout the centuries of Muslim rule gold coins were in use and circulation for business transactions. It is thus incorrect to assume that the gold coins were meant for "hoarding" purposes or that they were, as one writer puts it, "mere 'fancy' coins used for paying presents to the emperor or higher officers".² Gold coins were indeed sometimes hoarded,³ but that was not the purpose for which they were minted. Not only were gold coins issued on a rather large scale, gold vessels and utensils were used by the wealthier sections, and articles and really fancy goods made of gold were presented on suitable occasions to appropriate persons, as indeed to the members of the Chinese mission of 1412. It appears that there was a considerable influx of gold and silver into the country not long after the establishment of Muslim rule. The only reasonable explanation is that the Muslim rulers by their revolutionary change in the currency system and other measures for the encouragement of trade and industry opened the flood-gates of international trade for Bengal which, because of its valuable agricultural and industrial products, became before long the "sink", as one modern European writer puts it, "where gold and silver disappeared without the least prospect of return".⁴

Coins were issued, as noted earlier, from a number of mints during the same reign which fact undoubtedly reflects the great economic prosperity and commercial activities of the time. Taking the Sultānat and the Mughal periods together the hitherto discovered coins give us the names of more than twenty-five mint-towns wherefrom coins were issued at different times.⁵

¹ See *E.F.I.*, New Series, IV, 342, 353, 354. One communication from the English agent at Hugli dated 27 November 1684, for instance, states that "the coining of silver was at last proceeding, and that he hoped to finish it, as well as that of the gold, by the middle of December." - *ibid.*, 354.

² A. Karim, *Murshid Qulī Khān and His Times*, Dacca, 1963, 93.

³ Sebastien Manrique who visited the ruined city of Gaud in 1641 mentions the discovery in a hollow wall of 3 copper vessels filled with gold coins and precious stones valued at 3 crores of rupees. - *Manrique*, II, 128-132. In 1766 Captain Adamas made a similar discovery in a ruined vault at Gaud. - *Siyar*, III, 386. See also *Memoirs*, 144-145.

⁴ A. Dow, *Indoostan*, CXII.

⁵ These are: (1) Lakhnawatī (Gaud), (2) Firūzābād (Pandua), (3) Sātgaon (near Hugli), (4) Sunārgāon (near Dacca), (5) Mu'azzamābād (most probably in Mymensingh), (6) Shahr-i-Nau (on the Ganges), (7) Ghiyāthpur (near Gaud), (8) Fathābād (Faridpur), (9) Husainābād (Twenty-four Parganas), (10) Khalifatābād (Bagerhat), (11) Muzaffarābād (near Pandua), (12) Chātgaon =

There are also several coins which mention only the "mint" or "the treasury" as their issuing place without further specification. Some of the mint-names are obviously synonyms, being different names for the same place or places; but even taking this into account we get at least 15 different and distinctly known towns. The first Sultān to issue coins from more than one place appears to be Shams al-Dīn Ilyās Shāh (740-759/ 1339-1358) whose coins were minted from Firūzābād (Pandua), Sunārgāon and another place called Shar-i-Naw, which was most probably a new town founded in the suburb of Pandua. During his son Sikandar Shāh's reign (759-792/ 1358-1389) coins were issued from six different mints which were, besides the three above mentioned places, Sātgaon (Hugli), Chawalistān alias Kāmrū (Assam, most probably Sylhet) and Mu'azzamābād (most probably in Mymensingh district). This appears to be the maximum number of mints during any single reign, though the places differed from time to time. Chittagong and Faridpur appear as mints for the first time during Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad Shāh's reign (818-835/ 1415-1431),¹ whereas Khalīfatābād (Bagerhat) appears as a mint for the first time during Nuṣrat Shāh's reign (925-939/ 1518-1532), though the region was brought under the Muslim sway much earlier, during the latter Ilyās Shāhī ruler Nāṣir al-Dīn Maḥmūd Shāh's reign at the latest. The use of more than one mint continued till the end of Muslim rule. During the Mughal and the Nawwābī period coins were issued from two or three of the four places of Dacca, Rajmahal, Murshidabad and Patna.

The standard weight of the Bengal coins was 166 grains Troy. As regards purity of metal it is stated by a competent authority that "while the Delhi coinage generally gives from 990 to 996 grains to the test total of 1000, in Bengal the earliest coinages give a return of only 989 grains: in the time of Bahāhdur Shāh there was some rise of purity, but later on the proportion fell

= (Chittagong), (13) Muhammadābād, (14) Maḥmūdābād, (15) Jannatābād, (16) Naṣratābād, (17) Bārbakābād (probably different names for the same place), (18) Chāwalistān alias Kāmrū (Sylhet), (19) Arākān, (20) Rohtaspur, (21) Sharīfābād, (22) Patna, (23) Rajmahal, (24) Tanda, (25) Dacca and (26) Murshidabad.

¹ The six mints during his time were: Firuzābād, Sātgaon, Mu'azzamābād Fathābād, Chatgaon and Sunārgāon.

so low as 962 grains in the time of A'zam Shāh."¹ In simpler terms the standard weight of both silver and gold coins was a *tola* or 1/80th part of a *seer* (2.1 lb. approximately). According to Thomas the term *tangāh* is derived from an old Persian word meaning a thin plate, leaf or slice of gold or silver (ورق).² Ibn Batūṭa's evidence would suggest that both the silver and gold coins were also known as *dinār*, and that there was a smaller denomination called *dirham*, eight of which made a silver *dinār*. As regards size the standard diameter of a silver coin was 1.2 inches, which was the size as early as the time of the Chinese mission of 1412. Ma-Huan states: "In trade they use a silver coin called Tangka, weighing three candareens an inch and two-tenths in diameter and with writing on either side."³

We do not know for certain the relative conversion rate between a silver and a gold coin; but some information is available about that between *cowries* and a silver *tankā*. One of the Chinese accounts states: "In their dealings they use cowrie shells, 10520 odd being exchanged for a small coin (i.e. Tangka). It is extremely convenient currency for the people."⁴ Nor do we have any definite information about the relative exchange rate of Bengal coins, especially in the earlier period, with those of the other countries. It can only be assumed that since token currencies were not generally in vogue at that time and since coins of no specific country had attained the status of an international currency, the coins of the commercially developed countries of the time were more or less comparable in respect of intrinsic metallic value. In the latter half of the seventeenth century we have references to the English Pound being then equivalent to 10 Bengal rupees (*tankā*)⁵.

II: AGRICULTURE

The prosperity of the country was due in a considerable measure to the extension of agriculture by reclaiming virgin lands and making new settlements on them. Before the coming of the

¹ H.N. Wright, *Cat. II*, 144.

² Thomas, *Chronicles etc.*, *op. cit.*, 37, 49.

³ V.B.A., I., 1945, 117. See also p. 125.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 99. This rate changed subsequently, however, when 4 *cowries* made a *ganda*, 20 *gandas* made an *anna*, and 16 *annas* made a *tankā* (rupee).

⁵ See *E.F.I.*, 1655-60, 275.

Muslims vast tracts of alluvial lands, especially in the southern regions, were still covered with forests. The attention of the newcomers was directed to the reclamation of these lands partly for the purpose of settling bands of immigrants who poured into the country from time to time, and partly for increasing its agricultural out-put by bringing more of those fertile tracts under cultivation. The work seems to have been undertaken quite early in the period, though the exact time and areas involved are not known, for its salutary effects were observed in the first half of the fourteenth century. A Chinese account of 1349-50 states: "These people owe all their tranquillity and prosperity to themselves, for its source lies in their devotion to agriculture whereby a land originally covered with jungle has been reclaimed by their unremitting toil in tilling and planting. The seasons of Heaven have scattered the Wealth of the Earth over this kingdom."¹ Almost about the same time (1340) Ibn Baṭūṭa visited east Bengal. He gives a similar picture of the country in his accounts. He says that as he journeyed from Sylhet to Sunārgāon by river for 15 days he saw on his right and left orchards, water-wheels, prosperous villages and gardens, "as if we were passing through a market."² Such agricultural prosperity had already been attained, it may be noted, before the new phase of reclamation and colonization was undertaken during the later Ilyās Shāhī period. Sulṭān Nāṣir al-Dīn Maḥmūd I, (846-864/ 1442-1459) the first of the restored Ilyās Shāhī ruler who had himself taken to agricultural pursuits before his restoration to the throne, paid special attention to this work. As already noted, it was during his reign and that of his successor Rukn al-Dīn Bārbak Shāh that the southern regions of Khulna and Barisal districts were cleared and settled.³ Many of the place names with *ābād* (meaning settled or brought under cultivation), such as Khalīfatābād, Faṭḥābād, etc., still bear testimony to their being first cleared and settled during the Muslim rule. Some coins also contain the significant legend, *al-'arṣa al-ma'mūra* (العروة المعمورة = settled district).⁴ In fact

¹ Wang Ta-yuan's account, V.B.A., I., 1945, 99.

² *Rihla*, 615.

³ *Supra*, pp. 166-167, 169.

⁴ *Cat.*, 142.

promotion of agriculture and reclamation of lands continued to receive special attention throughout the period. During the Mughal period some of the viceroys like Prince Shujā' and Shāista Khān paid great attention to the matter. One of the grounds on which Prince Shujā' prayed for an extension of his jurisdiction to include Bihar as well was that he had made considerable progress in the work of reclamation of lands and extension of agriculture in Bengal.¹ During Shāista Khān's time Bernier came to Bengal (1661). He saw on both banks of the Ganges from Rajmahal to the sea "extensive fields of rice, sugar corn, three or four sorts of vegetables, mustard, sesame for oil, and small mulberry-trees, two or three feet in height, for the food of silk-worms. But the most striking and peculiar beauty of Bengale is the innumerable islands filling the vast space between the two banks of the Ganges... These islands vary in size, but are all extremely fertile, surrounded with wood, and abounding in fruit trees, and pine-apples, and covered with verdure; a thousand water-channels run through them, stretching beyond the sight, and resembling long walks arched with trees."²

The chief agricultural produce was rice. It was grown in such abundance that after meeting the local needs there remained always a big surplus for export. All the accounts say that the land was extremely fertile so that there was no need for artificial irrigation, or, as the Chinese put it, "no need of sowing the seeds—the crops grow by themselves in the proper seson".³ The same piece of land yielded two or three crops a year.⁴ A great variety of rice was indeed produced of which the Bengali literature of the time mentions some fifty names,⁵ while the Mughal chronicler Abū al-Faḍl states that if a single grain of each kind were collected they would fill a large vase.⁶ "Bengal produces rice in such abundance", writes Bernier, "that it supplies not only the neighbouring but remote states. It is carried up the

¹ *Supra*, pp.371-372.

² *Bernier*, 442-443.

³ *V.B.A.*, I., 1945, 132. See also p. 123, and *Bernier*, 453.

⁴ *Ibid.*, and *Āin*, II, 130.

⁵ N. Ray, *Bānglār Itihāsa*, 173, 537 quoted in A. Rahim, *op.cit.*, II, 413-414.

⁶ *Āin*, II, 134.

Ganges as far as Patna, and exported by sea to Maslipatam and many other ports on the east of Koromandel. It is also sent to foreign kingdoms, principally to the island of Ceylon and the Maldives."¹ There is also some reference to the cultivation of wheat; but its cultivation and consumption were limited. Of the other agricultural edibles produced in the country were millet, a variety of vegetables, sesamum, mustard, beans, ginger, onions, garlic, cucumbers, bringal, etc. Of fruits mention is specially made of banana, mango, melons, pine-apple, jack-fruit, pomegranate, cocoa-nut, and betel-nut, and also, at a later period, of oranges.² Another important edible agricultural produce was sugar cane. It supplied the raw-material for the big sugar industry of the country.

Two other notable agricultural products which fed the local industries were cotton and mulberry trees, the latter for the food of silk worms. Both cotton and silk cloths were the principal industries of the country. Cotton was cultivated in different districts of western, northern and eastern Bengal. In west Bengal quite a large quantity was produced in Birbhum, Burdwan and Nadia districts; while in north Bengal it was produced specially in Rangpur, Dinajpur and parts of Malda districts.³ The finest quality of cotton suitable for the famous *maslin* industry was produced, however, in Dacca and parts of Mymensingh districts. Even after its decline in the British period John Taylor, an agent of the English East India Company stationed at Dacca about the year 1800 notes that the cotton produced over a large tract in Dacca and along the banks of the Meghna was the "finest" that was to be found in "any part of the world, since no cotton that has yet been compared with it, whether the produce of India or of the Islands of Mauritius or Bourbon, whose cotton is celebrated for its superior quality, has been found equal to it, and in no other quarter of the globe, as far as I have been able to collect information on these subjects, is cotton of the quality of Dacca

¹ Bernier, 437.

² All these fruits, except orange and pomegranate, are still produced in the country in a large quantity. Cocanut and betelnut trees are still the main vegetation that dominates the landscape in southern Bengal.

³ J.C. Sinha, *Economic Annals of Bengal*, London, 1927, 113-119.

coppas [Kārpās, Bengali name for cotton] known.”¹ Taylor also mentions that the superiority of the cotton of the above-mentioned districts was attributed to their “vicinity to the sea, the water of which mixing as the tide rolls it in, with the water of the Meghna, which overflows that part of the country, during three months of the year, deposits as it subsides, sand and saline particles, which very considerably improve and fertilize the soil, which consists of light and brown earth. It is also thought that the freshness of the sea air may have some beneficial effect in nourishing the plantations of coppas”. Speaking about the area over which this very fine quality of cotton was produced Taylor writes: “The tract of land above-mentioned from Feringibuzar to Idlepore, the banks of the Luckia [Lakhya] from the Delassery [Dhaleswarī] to a little above Roofgunje [Rupganj], an extent of about 16 miles, and a few miles of the banks of the little Burrumpoota [Brahmaputra], north of Delassery furnish the greater part of the coppas used in the Dacca province. Of the rest some is grown in Budecaul [Baldakhal], Bowal [Bhawal] and Alfesing, and some is imported from Boosna [Jessore district] in the adjoining province of Rajeshy [Rajshahi].”² Taylor further informs us that the cotton seed was sown in October and November, and harvested in April and May. The plants grow 3 to 4 feet in height. They were rooted up after the crop was gathered and the same land produced paddy before next sowing in October-November. In the fourth year the land was left fallow or was appropriated to some other crop.³

Mulberry trees for silk worms were grown in central and north Bengal, principally in Murshidabad and Rajshahi districts.⁴ The plant was introduced into Bengal during the Muslim period most probably from China. Both Bernier and Tavernier as well as the English factory records of the late eighteenth century are full of references to the cultivation of mulberry trees in the above mentioned areas. Of the other agricultural products used for

¹ Quoted in *J.A.S.P.*, VII, 1962, 313-14.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Some are still grown in these districts for the now almost dying silk industry there.

industries we get mention of jute in both Bengali literature and Abū al-Fadl's work, as well as in the accounts of the European travellers.¹ But its cultivation does not seem to have been extensive during the period under review. From the seventeenth century onwards we get references to the cultivation of indigo; but the plant was grown in any commercial scale only during the early British period.

The system of agriculture was naturally primitive in the sense that ploughs were drawn by cows or tame buffalows, no "industrial revolution" having taken place at that time. These animals as well as other domestic animals like goats and sheep were reared in the country in sufficient quantities. For these animals adequate pasture lands were available. Manrique states that along with villages, towns and cultivated lands he saw "large areas of pasture... covered with immense herds of cows, tame buffalows, sheep and goats..."²

III: TRADE AND INDUSTRIES

Agriculture indeed formed the backbone of the country's economy and the basis of its industries and flourishing commerce. Some of its agricultural products like sugar-cane, cotton and mulberry trees were specially geared to the needs of the local industries. And both the surplus foodgrains and industrial goods produced with the raw materials grown in the country gave an unprecedented impetus to trade and commerce. With the coming of the Muslims Bengal was indeed drawn into the main stream of an extensive international trade then almost exclusively in the hands of the Arabs, Persians and Turks. They were also in control of not only the land routes but also the sea-routes till the end of the sixteenth century. There is evidence showing that a number of those traders came to Bengal even during the time of Ikhtiyār al-Dīn Bakhtiyār Khaljī, almost immediately after his conquest of Nadia. When the Muslim rule was consolidated in Bengal a great many Muslim merchants settled in Bengal and engaged themselves in trade and commerce. The Chinese visitors of the early fifteenth century who had come in contact mainly with the

¹ See J.N. Das Gupta, *op.cit.*, 105.

² *Manrique*, II, 123.

port-towns of Chittagong and Sunārgāon and the capital city of Pandua observed, in relation to their Muslim population, that "every one of them" was "engaged in business".¹ Duarte Barbosa, who visited Bengal early in the sixteenth century mentions that the many towns in Bengal "both in the interior and on the sea-coast" were inhabited by "Moors and Gentiles, amongst whom there is much trade in goods and much shipping to many parts, because this sea [Bay of Bengal] which enters towards the north, and at its inner extremity there is a very great city inhabited by Moors called Bengals, with a very good harbour".² The reference is obviously to the mouth of the Ganges and to the port-town of either Sunārgāon or Śrīpur, which was a "great city" at the time of Ralph Fitch's visit in 1586, situated at the junction of the Ganges and the Meghna (not far from modern Chandpur). Barbosa further notes that the Muslim (Moo) inhabitants of the city of 'Bengala' were "white men and well-formed.... both Arabs and Persians, Abyssinians and Indians, who congregate here on account of the country being very fertile and of a temperate climate. They are all great merchants...."³

In its extensive international trade Bengal had more to export than to import; for the two basic needs of the people in general, food and cloth, were produced in abundance and were in fact the two main items of export for the country. The only things that needed to be brought from outside were therefore some fancy goods for the more comfortable classes, and gold, silver and iron for manufacturing swords and cannons. Indeed gold and silver in specie were the main things taken in lieu of the country's exportable commodities. This explains the remarkable influx of these two precious metals into the country during the period. The Chinese trade with Bengal early in the fifteenth century, for instance, consisted of gold, silver, satins, silk, blue and white procelain, copper, iron, musk, vermillion, quick-silver and grass-mats.⁴ On the other hand, even as early as the mid-fourteenth century Bengal's export consisted of rice and cotton

¹ V.B.A., I, 1945, 122.

² Quoted in J.N. Das Gupta, *op.cit.*, 114.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ V.B.A., I, 1945, 123.

stuffs.¹

The chief industry of the country was cotton and silk cloth. Whether it existed in any appreciable extent during the pre-Muslim period is not definitely known. Even if it had existed, it was definitely vastly expanded and improved by the Muslims. The famous *maslin* industry of Dacca was particularly a contribution of the Muslims. It is also clear from literary and other sources that Muslims were mainly engaged in the work of weaving for which they came to be known specially as *Jolās*.² A very large quantity of cotton cloth was produced in different districts by weavers working on hand-loom (*tānt*); but the best and most well-known varieties were made in Dacca district. In many cases weavers were also agriculturists who devoted themselves to the work of weaving when they were free from cultivation and sowing. As already indicated, by the first quarter of the fourteenth century cotton cloth had become an exportable item in the country's expanding foreign trade. It was exported not only to the different parts of the Indian subcontinent but also to the south-east Asian and far-eastern countries including China. Ibn Baṭūṭa states (1340-41) that after having sailed for 15 days from Sunārgāon on his way to China his ship arrived at a place called "Barahnakar" where he saw a "settlement of Muslims from Bangal" selling fine cloths brought from there.³ In the following century the industry expanded considerably. The Chinese missions who visited Bengal early in the fifteenth century were highly impressed by the variety and quality of Bengal's cloth. Ma-Huan noted (1425) at least six varieties of cloth of which some names are found in use even centuries later on. He wrote: "Of cotton fabrics they have *pi-fu* of several colours;... it is over three feet broad and fiftyseven feet long. It is as fine and as glossy as if painted. There is a ginger-yellow cotton stuff called *man-che-ti* which is four feet broad and over fifty feet long; it is very closely woven and strong. What is called *Sha-na-pa-fu* [Persian = Shanbaft]⁴ is five feet

¹ *Ibid.*, 99; see also below.

² See for instance Mukundarām quoted in J.N. Das Gupta, *op.cit.*, 91.

³ *Rihla*, 616.

⁴ This variety is mentioned in Barbosa's account (1514) as "the best of all". See below.

broad and forty feet long;... What is called *K'i-pai-lei-ta-li* is three feet broad and sixty feet long. (This) cloth is losely woven and coarse; it is a cotton gauze. The stuff for turbans is called *sha-te-eul* (*chādar*); it is five inches broad and forty feet long and is like our *san-so*. *Mahei-ma-lei* is a stuff four feet broad and twenty feet long; and on the wrong side it is covered with nap half an inch long; it is our *tu-lo-kin*. They weave with silk, embroidered silk handkerchiefs. They have also brocaded taffetas."¹

Early in the following (sixteenth) century the Portuguese Duarte Barbosa visited Bengal (1515) and noted that there was "much cotton in this country" and that "many kinds of stuffs, extremely fine and delicate" were manufactured there. Some of these were coloured for use in the country, he says, while the others were white for "trade to all parts." "They are very precious", he added, "also some which they call *estravantes*, a certain sort very thin kind of cloth much esteemed among us for ladies' head-dresses, and by the Moors, Arabs and Persians for turbans. Of these great store is woven so much so that many ships take cargoes thereof for abroad; others they make called *maonas* [malmals?], others *duguzas* [two-yardly pieces], others *chautares* [chādars], others *Sinabafas* [Shanbaft] which latter are the best of all, and the Moors held them the best for shirts. All these sorts of cloth are in pieces, each one whereof contains about three and twenty or four and twenty Portuguese yards. In this (Bengala) they are sold at a low price. They are spun on wheels by men and woven by them."² Again, more than a century after Barbosa's visit another Portuguese, Sebastien Manrique, came to Dacca in 1640-41. He gives a similar account of the cloth industry of the land. "All these kingdoms of Bengala" writes he, "are much visited and resorted to by many foreigners on account of the good traffic which is carried on in food-stuffs and also in cloth." The traffic in food-stuffs, he further noted, consisted of "rice, oils, wax, sugar, butter and other similar goods"; while the greater amount of cloth was made of cotton and was "of a more delicate

¹ V.B.A., I., 1945, 119-120.

² Barbosa, II, 145-146.

and beautiful texture than can be found anywhere else.”¹ Speaking about the Dacca *maslins* Manrique wrote: “It is in these countries, too, that they manufacture the most delicate and valuable muslin pieces, 50 or 60 yards in length and 7 or 8 palms in breadth with the extremities embroidered in gold, silver and coloured silk. These muslins are so delicate that the merchants carry them in bamboo pipes two ordinary spans long and in this way they take them to Khurasan, Persia, Turkey and many other parts.”² A quarter of a century afterwards came the French merchant-traveller Bernier (1666). His description is equally interesting. There is in Bengal, writes he,³

such a quantity of cotton and silks, that the kingdom may be called the common storehouse for those two kinds of merchandize, not of Hindoustan or the Empire of the Great Mogol only, but of all the neighbouring kingdoms, and even of Europe. I have been sometimes amazed at the vast quantity of cotton cloths, of every sort, fine and coarse, white and coloured, which the Hollanders alone export to different places, especially to Japan and Europe. The English, the Portuguese, and the native merchants deal also in these articles to a considerable extent.... It is not possible to conceive the quantity drawn every year from Bengale, for the supply of the whole of the Mogol Empire as far as Lahor, Cabol, and generally of all those foreign nations to which the cotton cloths are sent.

Of the many kinds of cloth produced in Bengal *maslins* were the best and the finest in respect of texture, delicacy and quality. It was a speciality of Dacca for which the place became world-

¹ Manrique, I., 56-57.

² Ibid., 57.

³ Bernier, 439. In 1747, ten years before the British occupation of Bengal, the value of cotton goods exported from Dacca alone was estimated as follows:

For the Emperor.....	Rs. 100,000
For the Nawwāb of Murshidabad.....	Rs. 300,000
Jagat Seth	Rs. 150,000
Turani merchants	Rs. 150,000
Armenian merchants for Basra, Mocha & Jedda	Rs. 500,000
Mughal merchants for Basra, Jedda, etc.....	Rs. 400,000
Hindu merchants.....	Rs. 200,000
English Company for Europe.....	Rs. 350,000
English individual merchants for foreign countries.....	Rs. 200,000
French Company for Europe.....	Rs. 250,000
French individuals for foreign markets	Rs. 50,000
Dutch Company for Europe.....	Rs. 100,000
Total	Rs. 2,850,000

Dacca Factory Records, quoted in A. Karim, *Dacca the Mughal Capital*, Dacca, 1963, 87-88.

famous. Abū al-Faḍl mentions that Sunārgāon produced a great quantity of *maslins*.¹ These were very costly. One of the finest pieces alone cost Mirzā Nathan, the Mughal general and author of the *Bahāristān-i-Ghaibī*, four thousand rupees.² The main centres of *muslin* manufacture were Dacca proper, Sunārgāon, Dhamrai, Teetbaddy, Junglebari and Bazitpur.³ As indicated above, a special kind of cotton was produced in the locality for the manufacture of *muslins*. There were many varieties and categories of *maslins* bearing different names. Some of these were: (1) *chikan* (fine), (2) *malmal*, *tanzeb*, (adornment of the body), (3) *chārkonā* (square-shaped or with designs at the four corners), (4) *āb-i-rawān* (running water), (5) *shabnam* (evening dew) (6) *jungle-khesa* (a speciality of Junglebari), (7) *doorca* (striped), (8) *jāmdānī* (flowered), (9) *booty* (designed with knots), (10) *nayansukh* (pleasing to the eye), (11) *sarkār-‘ālī* (specially made for the *nawwāb* or viceroy), (12) *Malbūs-i-Khāṣ* or *malmal khāṣ* (specially made for the emperor), etc.⁴ The Muslim rulers specially patronized the manufacture of *maslins*. During the Mughal period a special officer called *Dārogha-i-Malbūs Khāṣ* was appointed to maintain looms for the manufacture of finest *maslins* according to specified standards for the viceroy's and the emperor's household (*Sarkār-i-‘ālī* and *Malbūs Khāṣ*)⁵. The *āb-i-rawān* and *shabnam* were among the most highly prized, while no less beautiful were the *Jāmdānī* and *Malmal Khāṣ*. Some of the *maslins* were so fine that, as Tavernier states, even if a 60 cubit-long turban were held "you would scarcely know what it was that you had in your hand." Other accounts say that a full size *maslin* could be easily passed through a small ring; while the others, if laid on the ground, could not be distinguished from the grass if dew fell on them. "For transparency, fineness and delicacy of workmanship", writes a keen observer, "the fabrics have never

¹ *Ain*, II, 124.

² *B.G.*, 43.

³ James Taylor, *A Descriptive and Historical Account of the Cotton Manufacture of Dacca*, London, 1851, 5.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 43-48. See also John Taylor's account, quoted in *J.A.S.P.*, VII, No. 2, 1962, 324-26. Some 18 varieties are mentioned in the English records. All the above mentioned items except no. 12 are preserved in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, where they are classified as such.

⁵ A. Karim, *op.cit.*, 85.

been equalled and not all the improvements in the art of manufacture in modern times have been able to approach them. Yet the implements used by the weavers at their work were primitive in the extreme. They consisted only of pieces of bamboo or reeds roughly tied together with thread and so laborious was the process of manufacture that it is said that one hundred and twenty instruments were necessary to convert the raw materials into the finest fabrics such as the *Āb-i-rawān*. Infinite care and skill were demanded and the strain on the eyesight was so great that it was only between the ages of 16 and 30 that weavers could be employed on the finest work. The excellence of their muslins was largely attributed by the Dacca weavers to the peculiar dampness of the climate and they were careful not to work in the middle of the day lest the heat of the sun might affect them.”¹

Equally extensive was the manufacture of silk cloths. Reference to the industry are available from the time of the Chinese missions early in the 15th century down to the time of European trade with Bengal in the 17th-18th centuries. According to Abū al-Faḍl a very large quantity of silk cloth and also some sack (jute?) was produced in Sarkar Ghorāghāt (Rajshahi).² Later on Malda and Murshidabad (Kasimbazar) became flourishing centres of mulberry cultivation and silk manufacture. According to Tavernier (1666) the annual out-put of Kasimbazar silk was about $2\frac{1}{2}$ million pounds (22,000 bales of 100 livres each), of which $\frac{3}{4}$ million pounds were exported to other parts of India and Central Asia, while the Dutch used to export about $\frac{3}{4}$ million pounds to Japan and Holland.³ Bernier states that though the Bengal silks were not as fine as those of Persia, Syria and Beirut, they were of “much lower price... The Dutch have sometimes seven or eight hundred natives employed in their silk factory at Kassem-Bazar, where, in the like manner, the English and other merchants employ a proportionate number.”⁴ The silk industry was further

¹ Bradley-Birt, *The Romance of an Eastern Capital*, London, 1906, 117-18.

² *Āin*, II., 123, 136.

³ Tavernier, II., 2-3.

⁴ Bernier, 440.

improved after Bernier's visit; and the records of the European companies deal elaborately with their trade in that commodity during the later part of the seventeenth and the first half of the eighteenth century.

Another extensive industry based on the country's agricultural produce was sugar. The Chinese accounts of the early fifteenth century speak of the abundance of sugar in Bengal and its export to other countries.¹ Visiting the land a century afterwards (early in the sixteenth century) Barbosa and Varthema also referred to the very good quality of Bengal sugar and its extensive exportation by "many ships" to other parts of the world.² The industry continued to flourish till the end of the period. Almost about a century and a half after Barbosa's visit Bernier noted (1666): "*Bengale* abounds likewise in sugar, with which it supplies the Kingdoms of *Golkonda* and the *Karnatic*, where very little is grown, *Arabia*, and *Mesopotamia*, through the towns of *Moka* and *Bassora*, and even *Persia*, by way of *Bender-Abbasi*."³ The French traveller further observed that on account of the abundance of sugar Bengal was also "celebrated for sweetmeats, especially in places inhabited by the *Portuguese*, who are skilful in the art of preparing them, and with whom they are an article of considerable trade."⁴ Along with sugar salt was also produced in sufficient quantities for export after meeting the local needs.

Another item of export, specially later in the period, was saltpetre. It was needed for the manufacture of gun-powder and was as such much in demand in the European markets in the 17th and 18th centuries. It was produced on a large scale in eastern Bihar, particularly in the Patna, Tirhut, Saran and Purnea regions and in Rangpur in Bengal. A considerable part of the European companies' trade in Bengal consisted of this commodity which was much cheaper and of a better quality than that found in south India. "*Bengale* is also the principal emporium of *saltpetre*", wrote Bernier. "A prodigious quantity is imported from *Patna*. It is

¹ V.B.A., I., 1945, 123, 132.

² Barbosa, II., 145; also J.N. Das Gupta, *op.cit.*, 117.

³ Bernier, 437.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 437-38.

carried down the *Ganges* with great facility, and the *Dutch* and the *English* send large cargoes to many parts of the *Indies*, and to Europe.”¹ An idea of the commodities for which the European traders thronged to Bengal in the 17th century may be obtained from the English East India Company’s letter written to their agents in Bengal, some seven years before Bernier’s visit, on 28 January 1659. In that letter the Company attached chief importance to saltpetre.²

for the purchase of which 5000 £ was to be remitted annually to Patna, where, it was stated, that commodity could be bought at rates 40 or 50 per cent cheaper than at Hūgli. To Kāsimbāzār 4,000 £ was to be sent each year, for investment in raw silk, taffetas, and cotton yarn. The prices anticipated there were about 9 s. per piece of taffetas and 5 d. or 6 d. per 1 b. for cotton yarn... The taffetas, it was added, could be gummed in England, and would then be as glossy as Italian silks. Any spare space in the ships was to be utilized for sugar (for sale on the Coromandel Coast), turmeric, cowries, and rice. In order to provide cargoes in good time, authority was given to the purchase yearly 8,000-10,000 pieces of long taffetas, 5,000 pieces of narrow, 8,000 tons of saltpetre (at about 6 £ per ton), 700 tons of sugar, 100 bales of silk (at 90-100 rupees the maund), 400 bales of cotton yarn (in short skeins and not cross-reeled), 30 tons of turmeric, 1,000 pieces of ‘adatay sannoes’, 2,000 pieces of ‘sannoos Harrapore’ [two kinds of cloths], and so much cinnamon as could be procured.

It may be noted that this letter relates to an early period of English trade in Bengal which was then far smaller in volume than that of the Dutch and when no English factories were established at Malda or Dacca, the chief places for cotton industry. As indicated in an earlier chapter³, the English investments in Bengal were increased more than twenty times by the end of the century. The letter is important as indicative of the types of commodities to be procured and the usual prices of some of them. A letter from the English agent at Kasimbazar written on 26 March 1659 indeed mentions that long *taffetas* were costing $4\frac{1}{2}$ to $4\frac{3}{4}$ rupees each, and short ones 17 to 18 rupees per score.⁴ Incidentally, this information about the price of a piece of long *taffeta* being $4\frac{3}{4}$ rupees,

¹ *Ibid.*, 440.

² Summarised and reproduced in *E.F.I.*, 1655-60, 275-76.

³ *Supra*, pp. 452-453.

⁴ *E.F.I.*, 1655-60, 275 n1.

corresponding with 9 s. as indicated by the Company, shows that 10 rupees of the time were equivalent to the then English Pound (20 shillings making a Pound).

A very important and useful industry introduced and developed in Bengal during the Muslim period was paper. It does not appear to have formed an item for export, but it definitely met the demands of literary activities and government communications. Interestingly enough, the Chinese observer Ma-Huan was apparently impressed by the system of written communications between the officers and departments in Muslim Bengal. He wrote (1425): "Their officials have seals and communicate by despatches".¹ He also noted the high quality of paper manufactured in Bengal. "Their paper is white; it is made out with the bark of a tree, and is as smooth and glossy as deer's skin."² As noted earlier, the sixteenth century poet Mukundarām makes special mention of the Muslim artisan class called *Kāgchi* who were engaged in the manufacture of paper in west Bengal.³ The region around Pandua in Hugli district, then an important town and Muslim settlement, was specially famous for its paper manufacture. "Its paper manufactories existed till the beginning of the present century", wrote Blochmann in 1870; "the term Paṇḍui Kāghiz is even now well-known among Muhammadans. The Pandua paper, I am told, was prized for its thinness and durability, whilst the Ārwālī Kāghiz, or paper of Arwal, a town and parganāh in Bihar, on the right bank of the Son, is still valued for its thickness."⁴

Another industry which attained a good deal of perfection in relation to that age was workmanship in iron. It catered to the needs for agricultural and other implements and tools as well as the government needs for various types of weapons. Indeed a large quantity of swords, arrows, spears, guns and cannons were manufactured in government workshops. One such cannon made in the Dacca ordnance factory (*Tōpkhāna*) was seen early in the

¹ V.B.A., *op.cit.*, 118.

² *Ibid.*, 120.

³ *Supra*, p. 810.

⁴ P.A.S.B., April, 1870, 120-121.

present century lying covered with trees near Murshidabad. It was popularly known as *Jāhānkoshā* (world conqueror) and was about 18' feet long with a circumference of 5'3", weighing 212 maunds. An inscription on it said that it was made at the Jahāngīrnagar (Dacca) *Tōpkhāna*¹ in Jamādī II, 1047 (October 1637) under the superintendence of Darogha Sher Muhammad.² Another mortar launcher (*Tōp*) called *Bādshāhwālī* with a diameter of 3' feet at the mouth was also seen in the vicinity of Murshidabad.³ A very big cannon made at Dacca was seen near its riverside some ten years after the battle of Plassey by Major Rennel who described it as follows: "I took the measure carefully throughout, and calculated each part separately. It was made of hammered iron, being an immense tube formed of fourteen bars, with rings of two or three inches wide driven over them, and hammered down to a smooth surface, so that its appearance was equal to that of the best executed piece of brass ordnance, although its proportions were faulty.

Whole length	..	..	22 feet 10½ inches
Diameter at the breech	..	..	3 feet 3 inches
four feet from the muzzle	..	..	2 feet 10 inches
The muzzle	..	..	2 feet 2½ inches
The bore	..	..	1 foot ¾ inches

The gun contained 234,413 cubic inches of wrought iron and weighed consequently 64,814 pound avordupois, or about the weight of eleven 32-pounders. The weight of an iron shot for the gun, 465 pounds."⁴ Unfortunately the cannon is no longer to be seen, having been washed away by the river in the last century. A smaller but still very large cannon used by Shāista Khān is to be seen at the present day in front of the Dacca Stadium where it has been placed for public view.⁵ A few cannons belonging to 'Īsā Khān were discovered by Stapleton early in the present century at Manwar-Khaner Bag near Narayanganj.⁶ These are now preserved in the Dacca Museum.

¹ The location of the *Topkhana* is roughly indicated by a street still called the Topkhana Road.

² K.P. Bandopādhyāya, *Bānglār Itihāsa*, Calcutta, 1315 B.E., 520-21.

³ *Ibid.*, 521.

⁴ Rennel, *Memoir etc.*, quoted in Landseer, *Antiquities of Dacca*, No.2,p.4,nb.

⁵ It was formerly on the river-side at the Sadarghat.

⁶ See *J.A.S.B.*, 1909, No.9, 365-375, Plate XXV.

Another important industry connected with both the sea-borne and internal trade of the country as well as with its defence establishment was ship-and boat-building. The industry was based on the easily available timbers from the southern forests and the valuable trees grown in the eastern and south-eastern districts. According to a tradition the district of Tippera (Comilla) was called Jājnagar (*Jahājnagar*, ship-building area) on account of its being one of the main ship-building centres.¹ That there were many great Muslim merchants who owned ships with which they carried on trade with distant lands overseas is beyond doubt. The instance of the Bengal Muslim merchants' ships which were pirated by the Portuguese on their very first voyage to Chittagong, that of the Chittagong Arab merchant Alfa Husain who owned many ships and who rendered valuable help to Sultan 'Alā' al-Dīn Husain Shāh in establishing his authority in that region, and that of Mīr Jumla's *junks* (sea-going vessels) wrongfully appropriated by some English merchants have been mentioned earlier.² A more graphic picture is given by the Portuguese traveller Barbosa who says in connection with the Muslim merchants of the city of "Bengala" that they owned "large ships of the same build as those of Mekkah, and others of the Chinese build which they call jungos [junks], which are very large and carry a very considerable cargo. With these ships they navigate to Cholemender [Coromandel], Malabar, Cambay, Peigu, Tarnasari [Tenasserin], Burma], Samatra [Sumatra], Ceylon and Malaca; and they trade in all kinds of goods, from many places to others."³ Barbosa's mention of the ships of the city of 'Bengala' being like those of Arabia and China might suggest that they were either obtained from those places, or, perhaps, they were built by persons from those countries, as indeed the traveller states that the inhabitants of 'Bengala' were. Whatever sea-going vessels were built in Bengal, however, were meant primarily for trade, and not for naval warfare. Neither the Mughals nor their predecessors in Bengal seem to have built up any navy worth the name and

¹ *J.A.S.B.*, 1874, 83.

² *Supra*, pp. 201, 225-226 and 389.

³ Barbosa, quoted in J.N. Das Gupta, *op.cit.*, 114.

capable of operating on the high seas.

A great variety and quantity of boats were indeed made for internal water communications and for the river flotilla of the rulers. During the Mughal period the office of the *Mīr-i-Baḥr* (Admiral of the river flotilla) was situated near Dacca where it remained even after the transfer of the capital to Murshidabad. The *Mīr-i-Baḥr*'s duty consisted in building and fitting a fleet of large vessels and galleys and his charges were assigned on a *jāgir* consisting of eighty villages about Dacca which in process of time yielded above 300,000 rupees.¹ A European observer who saw some vessels built at Dacca in the latter half of the eighteenth century states that some of them were "as big as the biggest galleys in Europe."² The French traveller Tavernier saw early in 1666 on the river-side near Dacca a "succession of houses separated one from the other, and inhabited for the most part by the carpenters who build galleys and other vessels." The traveller further observes that the viceroy Shāista Khān, who was then at war with Arakan, had in his navy at least "200 galleys besides several other small boats. These galleys traverse the Gulf of Bengal and enter the Ganges, the tide ascending even beyond Dacca.... It is most surprising to see with what speed these galleys are propelled by oars. Some are so long that they have upto fifty oars on each side, but there are not more than two men to each oar."³ Different types of boats were used in river warfare. Some of these, as mentioned by Mirzā Nathan, were *Kusa*, *Jāliya*, *Dhura*, *Sundara* and *Bajra*,⁴ but he does not give further specifications. It may only be assumed that the types and sizes were determined by the purposes which the boats were intended to serve. Those intended for carrying cargoes were generally big and flat bottomed for plying on shallow rivers, specially in the upper reaches of the country during the dry season. We get from the English records of the time the names of some cargo boats like *Patella*, *Bora* and *Palwar* which were used for transporting saltpetre from Patna to

¹ *Siyar*, I., 345.

² *Ibid.*, n.2 by the translator.

³ *Tav.*, I., 105.

⁴ *B. G.*, 56.

Hugli and thence to Pipli and Balasore on the Orissa coast.¹ The *Patellas* are said to have had a capacity to carry from 4,000 to 6,000 maunds (about 150 to 200 tons) of goods. A specially swift boat was *Parenda*, which was "one of the elegant boats of 20 or 30 oars".² Another very swift boat was *Bhovalia*, which was "from fifty to a hundred and twenty feet in length, upon three or four in breadth, rowed by 20 or 60 rowers. The rapidity with which they paddle against a stream that runs at the rate from seven to twelve miles per hour is past belief."³

IV: CITIES AND URBAN CENTRES

The flourishing trade and industries of the country gave birth in their turn to a number of cities, ports and urban centres. This urbanization was another remarkable aspect of the economic life of Bengal during the Muslim period. During the previous period we scarcely hear of the growth of any cities or urban centres as such except for the capital of the ruler and one or two ports in the southern part of the land. Even then all the ancient capitals and ports including even Gaud seem to have decayed into insignificance before the coming of the Muslims. In contrast, a large number of towns and cities grew up rapidly with the coming of the Muslims as administrative headquarters, mint-towns, rendezvous of trade and commerce and centres of learning.

At least five large towns came into being during the first decade of Muslim rule in Bengal. These were Lakhnawatī (Gaud), in Malda district, Deokot, Mahisantosh and Ghoraghat in Dinajpur district and Lakhnūr in Birbhum district. Lakhnawatī or Gaud, though situated near the site of an ancient town, was an entirely new capital city built by the Muslims. It occupied a strategic position, its western and southern sides being protected respectively by the Ganges and an affluent, while on the east and north were swamps and fortification walls. The city covered an immense area variously estimated at from twenty to thirty square

¹ E.F.I., 1651-54, 95; *Hedge's Diary*, III, 197.

² *Siyar*, II, 31. One such *Parenda* boat was used by 'Alivardī Khān when he visited at night the Afghan leaders' camps on the other side of the Ganges near Patna. See *supra*.

³ *Ibid.*, 190-91; also note (100) by the translator. A *Bhovalia* boat was used by Mīr Ja'far in sending down to the Englishmen their ladies after Sirāj al-Daulah's capture of Calcutta in 1756.

miles and its population varied from 600,000 to 1200,000. It also contained an inner city or citadel area which was strongly fortified. Besides being the administrative and military headquarters Gaud developed into a great commercial city. De Barros states: "The streets are broad and straight and the main streets have trees planted in rows along the walls to give shade to the passengers. The population is so great and the streets so thronged with the concourse and traffic of people, especially of such as come to present themselves at the king's court, that they cannot force their way past one another. A great part of this city consists of stately and well-wrought buildings."¹ "When the river flowed near Gaur", writes its local historian 'Ābid 'Alī Khān, "large boats carrying goods from different places used to come to the city from which there was also an export trade. The high land north of the Great Sāgar Dīghi is supposed to have been the commercial town. It was protected on the east by an embankment connecting the Duārbāshini Gate with the Phulwārī Gate. The places where cargo used to be landed are still to be seen as oblong shaped plots of high land with canals cut all round each plot. An old bridge midway to Pīran-i-Pīr (near the north-east corner of the Sāgar Dīghi) indicates also the passage by which goods were carried to the interior of the old city by small boats along a canal. Embankments communicating with the new course of the Ganges, run northwards for 20-25 miles from the present site of English Bazar. This shows that carts were employed as an alternative source of transport when the Ganges moved southwards."² The city declined because of this change in the river course and also of the transfer of the capital to another place. Its buildings were ruined however more by the brick and stone plunderers in the early British period than by the operation of nature. The mosques and tombs were spared on account of the sacredness which popular imagination attached to them, and that is why a good many of these structures, among all the others, are still to be seen.

About 20 miles from Gaud (about 12 miles from modern Malda town) in a north-easterly direction grew up another capital

¹ De Barros, *Da Asia*, Lisbon, 1778, VIII,458, quoted in *Memoirs*, 143.

² *Memoirs*, 142.

city named Pandua. Its court name was Fīrūzābād which leads a modern scholar to suggest that it was made capital about the year 1301 by Sulṭān Shams al-Dīn Fīrūz Shāh.¹ In any case it was definitely made capital during the time of Shams al-Dīn Ilyās Shāh (740-59/ 1339-58), and from the middle of the fifteenth century the mint-name of Fīrūzābād appears on the coinage to the total exclusion of Lakhnawātī (Gauḍ).² The capital was re-transferred to the latter city during the time of Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad, the converted son of Rājā Kāns (818-35/ 1415-31). When the Chinese mission came to Bengal in 1412 they found Pandua a very thriving city. "The city walls are very imposing, the bazaars well arranged, the shops side by side, the pillars in orderly rows, they are full of every kind of goods."³ It was further observed that both the "suburbs and the city itself" were "large and elegant".⁴ "Both the city and its outskirts are well-decorated. There are streets, markets and innumerable shops. Hundred kinds of goods are collected there."⁵ Today the ruins of Pandua extend for more than six miles from north to south and from 2 to 3 miles east to west, within which a paved brick road could still be seen in 1808 by Hamilton Buchanan who noticed also many small suburbs "which extended from the immediate vicinity of the town of Maldeh towards the east and north, for at least 12 miles. Next to Maldeh was Sujapur, then Fatehpur, then Mehmanpur, then Dandigal, then Behdari partly and Bahadurpur entirely in the district of Jagodal. In each of these is a considerable extent excavated with small tanks, and containing heaps of bricks and small stones."⁶ The most magnificent and significant architectural remains at Pandua are the Adīna mosque complex.⁷

Another city which grew up in the Malda district was Tanda. It was made capital by Sulaimān Karrānī in 1564 and it continued to be the occasional residence of the Mughal viceroys till the

¹ H.E.S. Stapleton's note, *ibid.*, 94.

² *Cat.*, 141.

³ Fei-Sin's account, *V.B.A.*, I, 121.

⁴ Huang Sing-tseng's account, *ibid.*, 124.

⁵ Yen Ts'ong-kien's account, *ibid.*, 130.

⁶ Hamilton Buchanan, *Dinajpur*, Calcutta, 1833, 41, 43-44; also quoted in *Memoirs*, 94-95.

⁷ *Supra*, pp. 888-891.

middle of the following century. It has however completely disappeared on account of changes in the river course, and its site cannot now be accurately determined. Another town which became the capital for sometime and an important military cantonment for a considerable period was Ekdala in the Dinajpur district.¹ Early in the Mughal period Rajmahal grew to be an important town and trade centre after the transfer of the capital there by Mansingh. It is about 25 miles due west of the Malda town at the point where the Ganges previously entered Bengal proper. In the thirties of the seventeenth century Manrique found it as one of the "chief" cities of Bengal.² When Tavernier visited it in 1666 the river had already shifted "a full half-league" from the town, but its trade was still "considerable".³ It continues to be a town of some importance. Gaud and Pandua, as already mentioned, are now in ruins; but they were reborn, so to say, during the Mughal period in the shape of Malda and English Bazar, both of which lie close to each other almost half-way between Gaud and Pandua and continue to be important trade and administrative centres in north Bengal.

To the west of Rajmahal, Bihar Sharif in south Bihar and Patna in north Bihar grew up as two important cities quite early in the Muslim period. In fact the earliest of the Muslim Bengal inscriptions hitherto discovered has been found at Bihar Sharif.⁴ Patna became an important centre of trade early in the Ilyās Shāhī period. Hājīpur, another name for Patna, is supposed to be derived from Hājī Ilyās, founder of the Ilyās Shāhī dynasty. Visiting the place in 1632 Peter Mundy described it as the "greatest mart" in all India where great merchants from Bengal and India gathered. It was "plentiful in provisions, abounding with sundrie commodities".⁵ Similarly Manrique described it as one of the greatest cities in the whole of the Mughal empire, with a population of 200,000, including many wealthy traders.⁶ "Patna is

¹ *J.A.S.B.*,

² *Manrique*, II, 288.

³ *Tav.* I., 102.

⁴ 'Izz al-Dīn Tughral Tughan Khān's inscription, dated 640. (1242), *J.A.S.B.*, 1873, 245-46; *E.I.M.*, 1913-14, 16-17.

⁵ *Mundy*, II, 157.

⁶ *Manrique*, II., 140.

one of the largest towns in India", also wrote Tavernier in 1666. Indeed the city continued to be a flourishing centre of trade and administration throughout the Muslim period, and it is still the provincial capital of Bihar. Of the other towns that grew up in eastern Bihar during the Muslim rule Monghyr, Bhagalpur and Purnia deserve mention. Monghyr was an important town when Tavernier passed through it;¹ and Purnia was an important divisional administrative headquarter during the time of the Murshidabad Nawwābs.

Besides the towns of Bihar and the capital cities in north Bengal a number of important urban centres and ports developed in other parts of Bengal as well. Four of them grew up in Hugli district alone. These were Pandua, Sātāgāon, Tribeni and Madaran. Pandua in Hugli is often described as Chhota Pandua in order to distinguish it from the capital city in Malda district. Chhota Pandua was a very important Muslim settlement and town and was, as already mentioned, noted for its paper manufacture. The ruins of its old mosques, and the great size of its tanks with their massive *ghāts*, to quote Blochmann, "amply confirm the tradition that Pandua was, till lately, a town of importance."² A tower, two old mosques and the tomb of Shāh Safī al-Dīn still bear witness to the site of the old town.³ Sātāgāon, a few miles to the north-west of modern Hugli town, was the chief port in south-west Bengal. The river Hugli (Bhagirathi) formerly ran by its side. Syed Jamāl al-Dīn ibn Fakhr al-Dīn of Amul (near the Caspian Sea) contributed much to the growth of the port and Muslim settlement at that place.⁴ It subsequently declined mainly due to the shifting of the river and its place was taken up by another port-town, Hugli, where at first the Portuguese were allowed to build some factories but where a great many Muslim merchants settled and contributed to its growth. It is still an important town though its former premier commercial position has been eclipsed by the growth of Calcutta.

¹ *Tav.* I., 100.

² *P.A.S.B.*, April, 1870, 121.

³ See *supra*, pp. 885-887, 899.

⁴ See *J.A.S.B.*, 1870, 280.

24 miles down the river, where the English were allowed to establish themselves in 1690. Tribeni, lying to the north of Hugli grew to be an important administrative and intellectual centre by the end of the 13th century. It owed much of its growth to the famous south-west Bengal governor Zafar Khān Ghāzī who lies buried there.¹ The site of the old town of Mandaran is now known as Bhitargarh (the inner fort). It is situated in the Jahānābād subdivision in the north-western part of the Hugli district. Abū al-Faḍl mentions Mandāran as an important town and adds that one of the villages in that revenue division (*Sarkār*) called Hirpah had a diamond mine.² There were formerly extensive fortifications which consisted, it is said, of seventy-two forts "and was therefore called Bahattargarh, or seventy-two forts, which the ignorant vulgar has changed to Bhitargarh or 'Inner Fort'. This alteration appears the more natural as round about the seventy-two forts, at an immense radius, a round wall extends, which, in opposition to Bhitargarh, is now-a-days called Bāhirgarh."³

Inscriptions mention a number of other towns in south-west Bengal. These were Laobla (Laopla), Hādīgarh and Husainābād in the 24-Parganas district, and Simlābād (Salīmābād), a few miles to the south-west of Burdwan in Burdwan district. The last mentioned town figures prominently in the Bengali poet Mukundarām's work.⁴ Besides these, Midnapur, Burdwan and Katwa developed into important towns at the latest by the Mughal period. It may be recalled that Shujā' al-Dīn Khān received the news of his appointment as *ṣūbahdār* in the vicinity of Midnapur and so he named the place Mubārak Manzil.⁵ Both Burdwan and Katwa towns figure prominently in connection with 'Alīvardī Khān's fights with the Marathas.⁶

Coming to east Bengal the most important port-towns and administrative centres were Chittagong, Sunārgāon and Dacca. Chittagong was the premier sea-port in the whole of Bengal. It

¹ See Zafar Khān's mosque and Madrasa inscriptions, *E.I.M.*, 1915-16, 10-13.

² *Āin*, II, 130, 138.

³ Blochmann in *P.A.S.B.*, April, 1870, 118.

⁴ See J.N. Das Gupta, *op.cit.*, 61. The poet calls it *Shahar Silimbāz*.

⁵ *T.B.*, 125.

⁶ *Siyar*, I, 390, 391.

grew quite early in the Muslim period to be the chief port through which passed almost the entire volume of the country's foreign trade. The name itself, as indicated earlier, was perhaps of Arabic origin.¹ The Chinese missions which visited Bengal early in the fifteenth century came by sea via Sumatra and Nicobar Islands first to Chittagong and then to Sunārgāon, both of which latter places they describe as flourishing ports.² "Tsa-ti-Kiang [Chittagong] is at the mouth of the sea", writes a Chinese account. "Merchants from foreign countries come from outside and anchor there. They assemble and divide the profits of their merchandise at this place."³ Sunārgāon was also a very big city surrounded by walls, "with tanks, streets, bazars" and carrying on "business in all kinds of goods."⁴ As already mentioned, both Chittagong and Sunārgāon were also mint-towns. Ibn Baṭūṭa found (1340) Sunārgāon a flourishing port wherefrom he sailed in a ship to the far east. It became an important intellectual centre in the Ilyās Shāhī period. The English merchant Ralph Fitch visited it in 1586. He writes: "Sunargaon is a town five leagues from Sripore where there is the best and finest cloth made of cotton that is in all India.... Great store of cotton cloth goeth from hence, and much rice, wherewith they serve all India, Ceylon, Pegu, Malacca, Sumatra, and many other places." Fitch further says that Śrīpur also was a "great city" situated at the junction of the Meghna and the Padma where "great store of cotton cloth" was made.⁵ Barbosa's account of the city of "Bengala" noted above had reference most probably either to Sunārgāon or Śrīpur. Another flourishing town noticed by Fitch was Bāklā (Barisal). As late as 1630 Sunārgāon along with Bāklā and Śrīpur were mentioned by another European observer as among "the rich and well-peopled towns upon the Ganges."⁶ In the second half of that century, however, Sunārgāon lost its importance on account of the

¹ *Supra*, p.39

² *V.B.A.*, I., 117, 120-21, 123, 128.

³ *Ibid.*, 128.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 121, 130.

⁵ Quoted in *J.A.S.B.*, 1874, No. . . /; also in J.N. Das Gupta, *op.cit.*, 144. Śrīpur must have been situated not very far from modern Chanpur.

⁶ Sir J. Herbert's account, quoted in *J.A.S.B.*, 1874, I., 86.

suppression of the *Bāra Bhuiyān* leader Mūsā Khān, whose headquarters it was, and its decline was hastened by repeated plundering incursions of the Portuguese-Arakanese pirates. Ultimately it was eclipsed by the rising city of Dacca which was made the capital of Mughal Bengal early in the century. Already by 1615 Sir Thomas Roe rated Dacca and Rajmahal as "the chief cities" of Bengal. And in the decades that followed Dacca rose as rapidly as Sunārgāon receded into insignificance. When Tavernier visited Dacca in 1666 Sunārgāon did not apparently attract his attention, for he is totally silent about it although he speaks about some other towns near Dacca. By Tavernier's time Dacca was already a "large town" with "considerable trade", though he was not impressed by its houses and other structures excepting "a very fine house" and "a fairly good" house built respectively by the Dutch and the English merchants there.¹ It may be noted here that some of the notable structures at Dacca like the Bara Kātrā had already been built prior to Tavernier's visit though he obviously failed to note them. Also a good many fine buildings were erected later on by Shāista Khān during whose time Dacca grew to be a much bigger city.² The other towns which Tavernier saw near Dacca were Bāgmārā and Kāzihātā. "On the 12th [January, 1666], at noon", writes the traveller, "we passed before a large town called Bagmara, and slept at Kasihata [Kazihata], another large town, 11 coss."³

Besides these, several other towns came up quite early in the Muslim period. These were Mubārakābād and Mu'azzamābād in the south-west and south-east respectively of Dacca,⁴ Fathābād (Faridpur) and Khalīfatābād (Bagerhat). The latter two were mint-towns. Two new towns, both bearing the same name of Sherpur, but one in Bogra and the other in Mymensingh district, are believed to have been founded by or during Sher Shāh's time. The towns of Murshidabad, then known as Makhṣūṣābād, Kasimbazar and Suti in the same district grew into prominence

¹ *Tav.* I., 101, 102.

² See for an interesting account of the city Bradley-Birt, *The Romance of an eastern capital*, London, 1906.

³ *Tav.*, I., 104.

⁴ *J.A.S.B.*, 1010, 147; Dani, *Bibliography*, 110-111.

during the Mughal period. Murshidabad was "a great town, 3 Koss from Kasimbazar", wrote Tavernier, "where the Receiver-General [deputy *diwān*] of Shāista Khān resided."¹ Both Kasimbazar and Suti were important centres of trade. At the former place specially the European companies had their agents and factories. "Cassimbazar is a very famous and pleasant town", writes Bowrey, "famous in many respects, first and chiefly for its great commerce and plenty of very rich merchants, the only market place in this kingdom for all commodities."² Two other towns which attracted Tavernier's attention were Donapur, 'six coss from Rajmahal' down the Ganges in Bengal, and Hazrāhāt (Acerat), "45 coss" from Dacca.³ Besides these Nadia, which was the capital of Lakshman Sena, also grew into a large town and important centre of trade.⁴

These towns and ports were connected by roads as well as water routes. One of the main highways constructed early during the Muslim rule connected the capital city of Gaud with Ghoraghat in the north-east and Lakhnūr in the south-west. Subsequently the main land-route from Patna to Bengal ran along the Ganges and passed through Monghyr, Bhagalpur and Rajmahal to Suti in Murshidabad district where the Bhagirathi branched off from the Ganges. At Suti the road also bifurcated. One road went through Murshidabad, Kasimbazar, Katwa and Burdwan to Midnapur and thence to Orissa. From this road another branched off, most probably at Katwa, going upto Hugli. Bernier went to Hugli by this latter road.⁵ The other road from Suti went to Dacca through Hazrahāt and Fathābād (Faridpur). There were many other roads connecting the different towns, administrative centres and market places in the country.

The chief means of transport by land was bullock-carts.⁶

¹ *Tav.* I., 108.

² Bowray, *Countries round the Bay of Bengal*, (1669-79), 132-33, quoted in A.C. Roy, *op. cit.*, 476.

³ *Tav.*, 103, 107.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 108.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 103.

⁶ *Siyar*, II., 94-95. Sirājula-Daulah, when he attempted to revolt against 'Alivardī Khān, set out for Patna on such a cart, "being drawn by an excellent pair of those oxen that make usually thirty or forty cosses in a day." Subsequently these two oxen were given by Mīr Ja'far to M. Wats.

Horses, mules, and sometimes camels are also found in use, especially by the Iranian, Armenian and Afghan merchants coming from the north-west by land-routes. The most convenient means of communication was however the rivers on which various types of boats were used, as mentioned above, for journey and transport of goods. The lower courses of some of the rivers were also navigable by ocean-going vessels. "In describing the beauty of *Bengale* it should be remembered", wrote Bernier, "that throughout a country extending nearly an hundred leagues in length on both banks of the Ganges, from *Raje-Mehale* to the sea, is an endless number of channels,... for the conveyance of merchandise".¹ Bernier mistakenly thought that these channels were cut by the people "in bygone days". In fact the Ganges and the Brahmaputra, together with their numerous affluents and distributaries intersected the country in such a variety of directions "as to form the most complete and easy inland navigation that can be conceived." Excepting the lands contiguous to Burdwan and Birbhum "every other part of the country has", to use the words of the foremost modern cartographer of the land, "even in the dry season, some navigable stream within 25 miles at the farthest, and more commonly within a third part of that distance."²

V: CONDITION OF THE PEOPLE

Inspite of the growth of a number of cities, ports and urban centres more than 80 per cent of the population lived in rural areas, as they continue to do even today. The general agricultural and commercial prosperity of the country was doubtless reflected in the economic condition of the people, though we have no detailed statistical information. In fact the continued prosperity of the country was ensured by a happy balance between agriculture and industry both of which combined to foster a thriving international trade. In forming an idea about the condition of the people three things may be kept in mind. In the first place, the number of population in those days was far less, probably not even a third or fourth of what it is today, the available modern

¹ Bernier, 441-442.

² Rennel, *Memoir of the Map of Indostan*, 245-46, quoted in A.C. Roy, *op.cit.*, 495.

census figures showing that the population has more than doubled in the last century alone. Consequently there was an abundance of agricultural land and a very few, if at all, landless people. As an illustration of this fact it may be recalled that till the end of the eighteenth century it was a matter of concern for many a zamindar under the early British rulers that the peasants might abandon their holdings and settle themselves in another zamindari. Even many small traders and the artisan classes like the weavers, paper and salt manufacturers and fishermen had a sound base in agricultural lands and spent a part of their time in agricultural pursuits. Purely landless labourers were very few, and even they were engaged in various professions. According to Rennel at least 30,000 people were constantly employed as boatmen on the Bengal rivers by the middle of the 18th century.¹ Secondly, throughout the centuries, as noted above, the country had a big surplus in food and cloth, the two most important necessities of life, which were produced in abundance and which formed the chief items of the country's export trade. Almost each family in the rural areas produced sufficient rice, if not more, to meet its needs. Each family had also its vegetable gardens, and cattle and fowl stocks, or little family dairy farms, so to say, for rearing meat, milk and egg. This was in addition to the fruit trees, specially cocoanut and betel-nut trees that form an essential part of every homestead in the southern districts. Similarly fish was available in almost legendary abundance. Abū al-Faḍl makes special mention of the plentitude of fish in Bengal; and Mirzā Nathan records that while the Mughal fleet of war-boats had been proceeding by the Karotoya river² a large number of fish jumped into the boats at the sounds of the trumpets so that he could present 40 big ones to the accompanying viceroy Islām Khān who ordered a meal to be prepared of them.³ A similar experience is narrated by Bernier. While proceeding by boat from Orissa along the coast towards the mouth of the Hugli river he saw "the sea

¹ Rennel, *op.cit.*, 246.

² In north Bengal, passing through Bogra and Rangpur districts (between 26 and 24 latitudes and 89 and 90 longitudes) and meeting the Brahmaputra about 20 miles above Goalando.

³ B.G., 53.

covered with fish, apparently large carp, which were pursued by a great number of dolphins. I desired my men to row that way, and perceived that most of them were lying on their side as if they had been dead; some moved slowly along, and others seemed to be struggling and turning about as if stupified. We caught four-and-twenty with our hands.”¹ Bernier’s co-traveller Tavernier also was not altogether deprived of a similar luck. As he was proceeding by river from Hāzrāhāt to Dacca on 9 January 1666 the crows were the cause, he writes, “of our finding a fine fish which the fishermen had concealed on the bank of the river in the reeds. For when the boatmen observed that there were a great number of crows which cawed and entered the reeds, they concluded that they must contain something unusual, and they searched so well that they found sufficient to make a good meal.”² The country enjoyed a continued plentitude of foodstuffs so that though we hear of occasional famines elsewhere in northern India we do not come across in the sources any instance of such a famine in Bengal during the whole period of Muslim rule. The only reference to a scarcity of food at Dacca is found in connection with Mīr Jumla’s Assam campaign; but it was entirely a localized incident and was quickly relieved by supplies from the other parts of the country. The English records make mention of a similar local shortage of food supplies in Calcutta and some areas in West Bengal, which was caused by the Maratha depredations but which also was relieved by pouring in supplies from the other areas. We get one specific instance of a natural calamity in 1582 when a cyclone and flood affected lower Barisal district.³ Similar natural disasters might have occurred at other times; but their incidences were definitely limited to the locality and to a short period till supplies and relief arrived from the other parts.

The third fact, and arising out of the two above mentioned ones, is that food and cloth and all other necessities of life were inconceivably cheap, as all the sources uniformly indicate. Ibn

¹ *Bernier*, 443.

² *Tav.*, I., 103. The present writer himself saw some 45 years ago 2 men in a lower Bengal district making a big catch of some 300 Hilsha fish with their simple net within an hour, and another couple of persons making a catch of three big baskets of prawns in about the same time.

³ *Āin*, II, 135.

Batūta's evidence in this respect has already been noted earlier.¹ The prices mentioned by him further came down considerably in the subsequent period. This is amply reflected by the early sixteenth century European travellers' accounts and also by the Bengali literature of the period. Vijayagupta, for instance, mentions that a weaver did his weekly shopping including varieties of fish and vegetables with a few cowries; while Vrindāvandāsa states similarly that Chaitanya's marriage ceremony cost a few cowries.² According to another poet an ordinary *Sārī* (ladies' dress) sold at only 18 cowries, that is, according to the rate of that time, about 250th part of a rupee.³ There seems to be no reason for the poets to exaggerate the cheapness of the articles in these instances; but even making allowance for this possibility and doubling or quadrupling the figures, the prices would still be incredibly nominal. Writing towards the end of the 16th century Abū al-Fadl notes the prices of some essential commodities in northern India as follows:⁴

Wheat	1 maund (approx. 80 lbs)	12 <i>dams</i> (i.e., $3\frac{1}{4}$ maunds a rupee, 40 <i>dams</i> making a rupee).
Rice	1 maund 16 <i>dams</i>	($2\frac{1}{2}$ maunds a rupee).
Barley	1 maund 8 <i>dams</i>	(5 maunds a rupee)
Pulse (Mugh)	1 maund 18 <i>dams</i>	(more than 2 maunds a rupee)
Pulse (Peas)	1 maund 16 <i>dams</i>	($2\frac{1}{4}$ maunds a rupee).
Pulse (Motor)	1 maund 12 <i>dams</i>	($3\frac{1}{3}$ maunds a rupee).
Wheat flour	1 maund 22 <i>dams</i>	(about 2 maunds a rupee)
Barley flour	1 maund 11 <i>dams</i>	(about 4 maunds a rupee).
Onion	1 maund 6 <i>dams</i>	(about 7 maunds a rupee)
Garlic	1 maund 40 <i>dams</i>	(about 1 maunds a rupee)
Oil	1 maund 80 <i>dams</i>	$\frac{1}{2}$ maund a rupee).
Ghee	1 maund 105 <i>dams</i>	(about $\frac{2}{3}$ maund a rupee)
Mutton	1 maund 54 <i>dams</i>	(about $\frac{2}{3}$ maund a rupee)
Milk	1 maund 25 <i>dams</i>	(about $1\frac{1}{2}$ maund a rupee)
Cloths:		
Tassor	20 yards	1 rupee
Bafta	20 yards	$1\frac{1}{2}$ rupee
Malmal	20 yards	4 rupees
Mahmudi (ordinary cotton cloth),	20 yards	$\frac{1}{2}$ rupee.

¹ *Supra*, pp.130-132.

² Vijayagupta's *Manasāmangala*, 58-59, and Vrindāvanadāsa's *Chaitanya Bhāgavata*, 95-96, quoted in A.Rahim, *op.cit.*, I, 403,407.

³ K.P. Bandyopadhyaya, *op.cit.*, 534.

⁴ *Āin*, I., 65, 101.

It may be observed that in Bengal the prices of these articles were definitely far less as these were produced there abundantly. About half a century after Abū al-Faḍl's time Manrique wrote that all the food stuffs and other supplies were "very cheap, since a 'candril (roughly 500 lbs.) of rice might cost three or almost four rupees. One 'Cantaro' (roughly 150 lbs.) of butter sells at almost for two rupees... As regards flesh-meat, in many places you can get a cow for there or four 'reals'; (a cow for rupee one or less and 25 fowls for rupees two) from 20 to 25 fowls for one 'peso' and all the rest accordingly... No less marvellous is the abundant supply of implements and eatables. Anything man desires or can wish for is to be found there, especially in the numerous bazars or markets. I would wonder there at the sight of the quantity and variety of fowls and wild birds, all of them sold alive and so cheap that it was like giving them away for nothing..."¹ Again, a quarter of a century afterwards the French travellers Tavernier and Bernier (1666) give the same picture about the extraordinary cheapness of all commodities in Bengal. In the previous quarter of the century, specially during the time of Shāista Khān, the price of rice came down to the lowest record level of 8 maunds a rupee. This definitely reflects the trade-boom and security which followed the break-up of the Portuguese-Arakanese pirates' nest at Hugli in 1632 and the conquest of Chittagong from the Arakanese in 1667. During the first quarter of the eighteenth century rice sold at 5 to 6 maunds a rupee; but it came down again in the thirties to the level of Shāista Khān's time². The Dacca Factory Records of the English for the year 1743 mention the price of rice to be roughly 2 maunds a rupee³ which, if correct, was a considerable rise upon that of the thirties and which might have been due to the Maratha depredations of the time in west Bengal upto Murshidabad, the capital itself. The entries in the factory records have however to be taken with caution because of the tendency of many an agent to show inflated prices in order to keep for himself a handsome margin at the cost of the Company. Even after the British

¹ *Manrique*, I., 56.

² *Supra*, p. 587.

³ *Dacca Factory Records* II, 22 May, 1743, quoted in A. Karim, *Dacca*, *op. cit.*, Appendix, 13.

take-over in 1757 and the period of confusion and unbridled exploitation culminating in the disastrous country-wide famine of 1770 the price of rice in 1780 was about 3 maunds to a rupee. The private accounts of a Katwa Brahman for the latter year show that he purchased 17 maunds of good rice at $6\frac{1}{4}$ rupees.¹

It is understandable that there were fluctuations in the prices from time to time. Even then the fact that clearly emerges is that throughout the centuries prices of the necessary commodities including foodstuffs were very low in comparison to those in other countries, and that therefore a person could maintain himself and his family with a very meagre income. The author of the *Riyād*, writing in 1788, states that a monthly income of a rupee only was enough for an ordinary person to maintain himself and his family.² In fact taking Abū al-Faḍl's figures as a basis for calculation a recent writer has shown that in those days a person could maintain himself, his wife and three children with a monthly income of $1\frac{1}{4}$ rupees.³ All the available information shows that the monthly wage of an ordinary labourer was in no way less than that amount. Abū al-Faḍl mentions the wages of some workers as follows:⁴

a carpenter	.... 7 to 5 dams	per day	(i.e. 4 rupees a month)
a water-carrier	.... 3 to 2 dams		(i.e. 2 rupees a month)
a brick-layer	.... 3 to $2\frac{1}{2}$ dams		(i.e. $2\frac{1}{2}$ rupees a month)
a bamboo-cutter	.... 2 dams		(i.e. $1\frac{1}{2}$ rupee a month)

The establishment charges for the English factory at Dacca in 1723 shows that among others a washerman was paid 4 rupees, a sweeper 5 rupees, a barber $2\frac{1}{2}$ rupees and a gardener 2 rupees a month.⁵ When in 1758 the Fort William Council at Calcutta decided to pay less than three rupees a month to a local porter (Cooli) many of the latter left their job because they could get more by working for a cultivator in the field.⁶ It would thus appear that the wage of a day labourer was not less than 2 rupees

¹ Quoted in K.P. Bandyopādhyāya, *op.cit.*, 539.

² *Riyād*, 304.

³ Pramathanāth Basu, quoted in K.P. Bandyopādhyāya, *op.cit.*, 535.

⁴ *Āin.*, I., 235-236.

⁵ *Beng. Pub. Cons.*, 25 March 1723, quoted in Karim, *Dacca*, 97.

⁶ K.P. Bandyopādhyāya, *op.cit.*, 539.

and that with this amount he could easily maintain himself and his family.

As already mentioned, purely landless or jobless people were almost non-existent in Bengal during the period under review. The need for extra working hands accounts for the import of some slaves into the country early in the period, as Ibn Baṭūṭā's account would indicate. But slavery as a system of forced labour and trade on human misery does not appear at all to be in vogue. The bringing in of a number of Abyssinian slaves by the Ilyās Shāhis was more or less in the nature of mercenary recruits; and these slaves enjoyed not an unenviable position and became ultimately the rulers of the land. In fact the word "slave" was understood in a very different sense in the Muslim society. As the *Siyar's* European translator aptly reminds us: "Care must be taken not to interpret this word slave, by American, or even by European notions. Amongst the Turks, a slave, if a male, becomes in general the son-in-law; and if a female, the bride of the family; and if an Habissinian or Nobi, he becomes the Steward of the house, and sometimes the bridegroom of it. In India, a slave, whether Georgian or African,¹ becomes in general the right-hand man of the family; and hence the word signifies *a man thoroughly devoted to another*; and this is the accustomed interpretation of the words *abd* ('*abd*) and *gholam* in Arabic, as well as in Turkish, Persian and Indian."² In Bengal the instance of a man of the soil being sold in slavery to another person in the country is nowhere available. It was only later in the sixteenth century that the Portuguese began to carry away forcibly people of the coastal districts and sell them as slaves to other countries. This was one of the reasons for the Mughals' intervention in the Portuguese settlement at Hugli in 1632.

The abundance and cheapness of food-stuffs and other necessities of life and the adequacy of even the minimum wage of a day labourer in relation to his needs ensured a more or less comfortable life for the people in general. This does not mean,

¹ The reference is obviously to the Turks in India (Bengal) and to the so-called slaves of Georgia and Africa that came with them.

² *Siyar*, I., 385-86, note(12).

however, that cases of financial hardships were altogether unknown. The sixteenth century Bengali literature mentions one or two instances of people borrowing money at interest at times of scarcity or special needs. In one important respect however the lot of the peasantry was far better than what it came to be after the end of the Muslim rule. The cultivators and tillers of the soil were the owners of the land and had the right to sell or mortgage it. There was no feudal system in the country. The *zamindars* and *jāgīrdārs* were not as such owners of the lands included in their charges. While the *zamindars* were revenue-collecting agents having a quasi-official position, the *jāgīrdārs* were full-fledged officials who were only assigned specific revenue divisions as *jāgīrs* for realizing their salaries therefrom. Not only were they themselves liable to transfers, they were often offered alternative *jāgīrs*. Moreover they were required to submit to the treasury the revenue realized from their *jāgīrs* in excess of their pay and emoluments.¹ Sometimes specific departments like the *nawwāra* (fleet of war-boats) were assigned *jāgīrs* for meeting their expenses therefrom. Thus the position of the *jāgīrdārs* and *zamindars* was very different in those days and the peasantry had a recognized right in the land.¹ On the whole the people in general led a life of economic ease and the country enjoyed agricultural, industrial and commercial prosperity continually for more than four hundred years—a record in respect of period alone for which it is hard to find a parallel in either medieval or modern times.

VI: IMPACT OF THE EUROPEAN TRADE

It was Bengal's undoubted wealth and prosperity which attracted the European traders to it. Coming as they did in the wake of the geographical discoveries and the consequent European commercial and colonial rivalry they came not simply to carry on trade as such but also to establish their colonial hold over the eastern lands. Their trading activities in Bengal (and elsewhere) were guided by this colonial motive. The most important and general result of the coming of the Europeans was the ousting of the Arab and Muslim mercantile fleet from the Indian ocean

¹ *Supra*, pp.553-557.

and other sea-routes and the establishment of the European naval supremacy over them. This enabled the European companies to establish their monopoly of trade between Asia and Europe which was formerly largely in the hands of the Arab, Persian and Turkish merchants many of whom had their commercial bases in Bengal. By the end of the 17th century such a monopoly was enforced at least by the English East India Company not only with regard to the English "private traders", but also with regard to the local and other traders. It so came to pass that even for shipment of goods to Asian countries the latter had to obtain 'passes' from the English Council at Calcutta. It is on record that during the shipping season between November 1705 and February 1706, 33 ships of various tonnage sailed from Bengal for Malabar, Surat, Persia, Mocha, Maldiv Islands and other Asian ports. Of these 33 ships 19 belonged to Muslim (Moor) merchants, one ship belonging to an English private trader was freighted by a Hindu merchant named Bārānāsi Seth, and the remaining 13 belonged to European private merchants. All these 33 ships had to obtain passes from the Calcutta Council.¹ This record also shows that "among the individual traders as distinguished from the companies, the Moors controlled more than half of the trade with the Asiatic countries."²

Before the coming of the Europeans Bengal goods reached Europe through the Arab, Persian and Turkish merchants. This trade was now entirely taken over by the Europeans. The carrying of Bengal goods directly to Europe by the Europeans might have meant an extension of that market for Bengal; but how far that expansion took place at the cost of other markets or of the trading operations of other merchants is not definitely known. The acknowledged fact of the rise in the volume of English exports from Bengal during the first half of the eighteenth century considered with the equally well-established fact of a corresponding decrease in the Dutch exports from the land during the same

¹ *Diary and Consultation Books*, quoted in A. Karim, *Murshid Qulī Khān and his times*, Dacca, 1963, 230-231, where the names of the ships with tonnage and destinations together with the names of the owners are listed.

² *Ibid.*, 232.

period would indicate that the increase reflected by the English trade was not absolute with regard to Bengal's economy and that this increase in the English trade was effected at least partly at the cost of the other European nations' trade. It is also noteworthy that by virtue of real or purported grants by the Mughal authorities the English Company enjoyed the privilege of custom-free trade in lieu of an agreement to pay annually a fixed sum of 3000 rupees. This amount was fixed at a time when their trade was inconsiderable; and even then it was not always paid regularly. Also, under cover of this privilege the private trade of the English company's agents and other Europeans and local individuals was carried on custom-free, and there was an extensive illicit traffic in such trade permits called *dastakhs*. In contrast, other European companies and local merchants not allied with the English had to pay $2\frac{1}{2}$ to 5% customs. Such discriminations of course reflect an inconsistent commercial policy on the part of the local authorities. But it shows that if there was an expansion of English trade in Bengal, it was accompanied by a loss of customs revenue of the country, by restrictions upon and discouragement of other traders, and by an adverse effect on the country's economy because of the private internal trade by the English agents. In view of these facts, and in the absence of total export figures for the previous periods, it would at least be hazardous to conclude on the basis of an increase in the English or European trade alone that there was an overall expansion of the country's export trade by the coming of the Europeans.

The Europeans had very few things to bring to Bengal. The Dutch used to import some tin, copper and spices from their eastern settlements, while the English brought in some broad-cloth, lead, copper, iron and fancy goods. In general, however, they had to obtain the Bengal commodities by paying hard cash for them. For this purpose they used to bring bullion and had it coined in the government mints. In this matter also the English claimed the privilege of having their bullion coined without paying any minting charge or 'customs' as it was called. The other merchants usually paid $2\frac{1}{2}$ % customs or mintage. According to one study the English company brought into Bengal during the

period from 1704 to 1727 bullion worth £ 21,040,119.¹ Computed in terms of rupees (@ rupees 10 a pound) it would come to some 21 crores (21,000,000) of rupees in 24 years; i.e. less than a crore of rupees in a year. Supposing that the bullion imported by the other European traders for the period equalled that of the English, the total value of the bullion would not exceed 2 to 3 crores of rupees a year. Compared with the country's vast riches and extensive trade this inflow of gold and silver through the European traders was rather inconsiderable. For instance, according to an English agent's report of 1676 the then viceroy Shāista Khān's daily income from his trade and other sources was "two lakh rupees" of which his expenses was "about one half", and that in his less than 13 years' governorship he had amassed an amount of 38 crores of rupees.² It may be pointed out that Shāista Khān was not the only one merchant in Bengal; there were many others who were almost equally rich. The import of bullion by the European traders, whatever its amount, could not therefore have produced any sudden or profound change in Bengal's economy. In fact the influx of gold and silver into the country was nothing new with the coming of the Europeans. It had been a regular feature of the country's flourishing international trade since at least the end of the 13th century. This fact has sometimes been ignored and the effect of the import of bullion by the Europeans has been over-emphasized. It has been stated, for instance, that by bringing in "huge" quantities of silver and gold into the country the European traders provided Bengal "with an universally accepted medium of exchange" and "enabled us to buy the products of the other provinces and countries to an extent inconceivable in earlier times, when barter was the chief method of trade."³ Needless to point out that barter was not the chief

¹ Bal Krishna, *Commercial Relations between England and India*, London, 1924, 217.

² Strevynsham Master's *Diary*, I., 32, 55, 327, 493. The Assamese sources put Shāista Khān's accumulation to 17 lakhs (S.K. Bhuiyan, *Annals of the Delhi Badshahate*, Gauhati, 1947, 167, quoted in *H.B.* II., 375).

³ *H.B.* II., 218. Another suggestion by the same writer is that the new money "at last enabled the Mughal viceroy to send tribute in money to his master at Delhi". And taking his cue from this suggestion another writer states that it "was such imports of bullion" that made it possible for Murshid Quli Khān to send "one crore of rupees to Delhi each year" (A. Karim, *Murshid Quli Khān*, op.cit., 229). Neither was revenue sent to Delhi merely in kind prior to the end of the 17th

method of trade prior to the coming of the Europeans. As already mentioned earlier in this chapter, a highly developed gold and silver currency was introduced by the Muslims from the very beginning of their rule and that this currency was in circulation and commercial use throughout the centuries. What actually happened with the coming of the Europeans was that they took the place of the others in bringing in gold and silver. The Dutch, for instance, brought the major portion of their bullion in gold and silver from Japan and Batavia which previously used to come to Bengal through Arab, Persian and other merchants. Since, however, the Europeans kept better records of their activities we get more specific information about their imports.

The need for changing foreign currencies and bullions into Bengal rupees led to the rise at an early date of a class of *ṣarrāfs* (bankers or money-changers). These people also arranged for the transfer of money from one place to another by means of bills of exchange or *hundies*. A number of *ṣarrāfs* had their offices at different centres of trade in the country and agents in other places. By the beginning of the 18th century the house of Jagat Śeth came to occupy the pre-eminent position in the banking business. Murshid Qulī Khān gave Jagat Śeth the exclusive privilege of getting the bullion of the foreign traders minted at the government mints. This ensured his rise and influence over the country's finances and politics.

The European companies obtained permission to establish trading stations or "settlements" and factories at some places. Some of these settlements like those at Calcutta and Hugli developed into important commercial centres. In pursuance of their colonial ambitions, however, the European companies fortified these settlements and transformed them into military bases for them. For procuring goods at a cheaper rate the European companies employed at their factories at Kasimbazar and Malda a number of local workers and artisans to manufacture silk. Sometimes European "experts" were brought in to give

= century, nor did Murshid Qulī Khān depend on the foreign bullion, which amounted to roughly one crore of rupees a year, to send a similar amount to Delhi, which would in that case completely deplete the province of all cash.

finishing touches to the silk produced in Bengal. While this led to some improvement in the industry, its other effects were not at all salutary. It transformed the European companies in a limited sense into manufacturers and producers, and curtailed the initiative and liberty of the local manufacturers and artisans. The larger amount of goods was obtained by the companies, however, through brokers and a class of middlemen called *dādani* merchants. These middlemen were almost exclusively Hindus. The brokers contracted for the supply of goods to the companies, took money from them, and engaged a number of middlemen or *dādani* merchants to make advances of cash to the manufacturers and weavers binding them to deliver goods at previously fixed prices and times. The rise of these brokers and middlemen, commonly known as the *bāniāns*, was one of the most important socio-economic results of the European trading operations in Bengal. By the middle of the eighteenth century a strong community of material interest developed between this class of people, headed by the Jagat Śeth, and the English company entrenched at their fortified settlement at Calcutta. It was this alliance which was a major factor in Sirāj al-Daulah's fall and the end of Muslim rule in Bengal.

CHAPTER XXXV CONCLUSION

Muslim rule in Bengal lasted for more than five hundred years (600-1170/1203-1757). This long period falls into two broad but unequal divisions, the pre-Mughal and the Mughal period, including the time of the Murshidabad *niyābat*. The first period is by far the longer, covering roughly four hundred years. During this period Muslim Bengal was a distinct political entity ruled by independent Sultāns, except for two short intervals. During the Mughal period, on the other hand, Bengal formed a province of the Mughal state and was governed by viceroys appointed by the Mughal emperors.

The period of the Sultānat was the most formative of Muslim Bengal history in respect of both its political and social evolution. During this period various groups of Muslims of foreign origin came and settled in Bengal, and evolved a state and society of their own. The political developments that took place were related more or less with such immigrations from time to time. The first Muslim state in Bengal was established by a group of Muslim adventurers of Turkish origin (Khaljī Turks) headed by Ikhtiyār al-Dīn Muḥammad Bakhtiyār Khaljī. After his death his lieutenants and companions held on to the new land and were subsequently joined by others. In the initial period there were struggles and conflicts among themselves for leadership. Also, as these people and those who had established themselves contemporaneously in northern India with Delhi as their capital were similar immigrants connected with the Ghoriid expansion, the question of adjusting the relationship between the two Muslim dominions often led to conflicts. Some of the Delhi Sultāns temporarily succeeded in exerting their authority over the Bengal Muslim dominion; but even their governors acted as independent rulers. It was out of the mutual rivalry and conflicts between two such Delhi governors in Bengal, coupled with the arrival of a fresh band of immigrants headed by Ḥājī Ilyās that led to the emergence of the Ilyās Shāhī dynasty of rulers in the middle of the fourteenth century (8th century Hijrī). This dynasty remained in power for about a century and a half except for a short interval

during which a local convert named Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad and his son ruled the Bengal sultanat. The Ilyās Shāhīs were finally supplanted by a group of Abyssinian immigrants who, in turn, were overthrown by a group of Arab immigrants under the leadership of 'Alā' al-Dīn Ḥusain Shāh towards the close of the fifteenth century (9th century H.). The Ḥusain Shāhī rule continued for about half a century when they were overthrown by the Sūr Afghans followed by the Karrānī Afghans. The changes in the lines of rulers thus took place as one or the other group of immigrants became powerful in state affairs.

The mutual struggles and conflicts among the Muslims themselves were the main cause of the rather slow progress in the extension of their jurisdiction further towards the east after their first flash of conquest of northern and central Bengal. Nevertheless by the end of the first century of their arrival their authority was extended from Bihar in the west to Sylhet in the east, and from Dinajpur-Rangpur districts in the north to the Sundarbans in the south. Indeed under the Ilyās Shāhī rulers the whole territory which subsequently came to be known as Bengal was brought under one political jurisdiction for the first time in its history.

A more positive and important result of the establishment of Muslim rule in Bengal was the emergence of a Muslim population and society partly because of immigration of Muslims and partly because of the spread of Islam among the local population. Indeed, during the first period the country assumed an essentially Islamic character which it has retained ever since. The different immigrant groups together with their relatives and followers settled in the land. Along with them came a number of learned men and preacher-settlers, also accompanied by their followers and adherents. Many of these savants established centres of learning wherefrom instructions were imparted in different branches of Islamic learning. Due to the preachings and teachings of these men a number of the local population embraced Islam in the course of the centuries. Such conversions took place gradually through peaceful persuasion and enlightenment. There is no instance of forcible conversion of any section of the local

population; nor is there any evidence of any mass or large-scale conversion at any given time. Conversions took place from all strata of the society, from Buddhists and Hindus alike. There is no basis for the assumption that only lower and poorer sections of the Hindus embraced Islam. In fact whatever specific instances of conversion are on record, they relate to persons of higher ranks. One of the local converts, Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad, belonged to a Hindu noble family and became, as mentioned above, the Sultān of the Muslim dominion of Bengal. His accession symbolized the integration of immigrant and local Muslims into one brotherhood and also indicated the significant fact that by that time (818/1415) the Muslim population had become the determining factor in the country's political destiny, for his succession took place as a reaction to his Hindu father's usurpation of authority.

The Sultāns championed the cause of Islam in their policies and activities. They described themselves as "Helper of Islam and Muslims" etc. on their coins and inscriptions and also inscribed the first *Kalima* on their coins. They established mosques and *madrasas*, patronized the *shaikhs* and the '*ulamā*' and adopted the rules of the *sharī'at* (Qur'ān and *Sunna*) as the fundamental laws of the government and administration. Some of the Sultāns recognized the theoretical supremacy of the Khalīfa of Baghdad, describing themselves as *Nāṣir 'Amīr al-Mu'minīn, Yamīn Khalīfat Allah*, etc., while others adopted the title of *Khalīfa* for themselves. They also maintained close and brotherly relations with the Muslim rulers outside the subcontinent, particularly with those of Egypt, and also sent large sums of money for charitable purposes including the establishment of *madrasas* at the holy cities of Makka and Madina. As a result Bengal attained a recognized position in and was regarded as part and parcel of the then Muslim world. But though championing the cause of Islam the Sultāns were not intolerant towards the non-Muslim population. On the contrary they treated the non-Muslims with unprecedented liberalism in consonance with the principles of equality and justice enunciated by Islam. Many non-Muslims were appointed in state services and patronage was extended to their learning and literature. One notable aspect of the Sultāns' policies

was the encouragement given to the cultivation of Bengali language which in fact attained its literary form under their patronage.

The economic policy of the Sultāns was geared to the well-being of the people and was characterized by systematic and balanced encouragement of agriculture, industries and trade, coupled with the construction of roads, bridges and dykes and reclamation of virgin lands. As a result the country attained proverbial economic progress and prosperity during this period. This prosperity continued through the Mughal period and attracted many foreign traders including the Europeans in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The Sultāns paid equal attention to art and architecture along with learning and literature. Both Arabic and Persian languages were cultivated, they being generally the languages of administration and culture. The literary activities of the time were essentially imbued with Islamic ideas and traditions. Even literary productions in Bengali by the Muslims drew inspiration from Islamic traditions and were generally aimed at instructing the people in Islam. And in so far as the Muslim writers adopted themes based on human activities and historical traditions they introduced a new and human trend in literary activities in contrast with the Hindu literary productions of the time which confined themselves to themes based on gods and goddesses. In the domain of arts also the spirit of Islam made itself equally felt. Calligraphy and architecture went hand in hand and were based on the styles and traditions developed by the Muslims elsewhere. Nonetheless both calligraphy and architecture show some local characteristics.

Apart from the Sultāns, the Muslim population adhered in general to the principles and teachings of Islam. They said the prayers regularly, observed fasting in the month of Ramaḍān and their well-to-do ones paid *zakāt* and performed *Hajj*. They also conformed to Islamic standards in respect of dress and diet. The Muslim ladies also observed veil or *purdah*. As in the case of contemporary Muslims in other countries, there were certain innovations and un-Islamic practices prevalent among the Bengal Muslims too. Such innovations and practices mostly came along

with the immigrants, though local influences contributed to their further growth. The most noteworthy of such innovations was *ṣūfism*. Its influence is noticeable from the beginning of Muslim rule in Bengal. The early *ṣūfīs*, however, do not appear to have been divorced from *sharī'at*. Some of them were indeed great *'ālims* and teachers to the people. Later on in the period, however, we get the picture of a very degenerated form of *ṣūfism* which gave rise to a number of heterodoxical tendencies. The Muslims of Bengal were (and still are) almost exclusively *Sunnīs*. Some *Shī'as* came during the Mughal period, specially during the time of the Murshidabad Nawwābs who were themselves *Shī'as*.

The impact of Islam on the Hindu society was deep and far-reaching. Even those who did not embrace Islam felt the influence of the principles of equality of man and the doctrine of one Lord for the whole of the creation. Such influences led to some reform movements in Hinduisim. The most notable of such reform movements was the *Vaishnava* movement of Chaitanya during the early sixteenth century (10th century H.). Chaitanya's movement was remarkably influenced by *ṣūfism* and was aimed at checking the progress of Islam among the Hindus. Indeed it was through the channel of *ṣūfism* that Hinduisim reorganized itself and succeeded in building up some resistance or resilience to the progress of Islam.

Also during the early sixteenth century when the Husain Shāhīs were ruling in Bengal the Portuguese appeared on its coastal region. In the middle of the century they began making serious incursions into the coastal districts. Their activities were facilitated by the end of the Husian Shāhī rule on the one hand and the beginning of the Mughal-Afghan contest for supremacy in northern India on the other. This struggle brought the Afghans into Bengal. The second half of the sixteenth century was a period of political instability and insecurity for Bengal. During this period the Portuguese and the Arakanese carried on systematic piratical raids in the coastal areas from the south and south-east; while the Assamese also pressed on from the north-east. After the fall of the Afghan ruler Dā'ūd at the hand of the Mughals in 1576 A.C. a number of Afghan chiefs and some of their former Hindu

officials and others established themselves as independent chiefs in different parts of Bengal. It took for the Mughals more than thirty years to subjugate these chiefs and to establish the Mughal sway over the whole of Bengal.

Effective Mughal authority in Bengal lasted for exactly a century, from the accession of Islām Khān as viceroy in 1608 till emperor Aurangzeb's death in 1707. From the point of view of Bengal history the two most important acts of the Mughals were the suppression of the Portuguese-Arakanese depredations in south Bengal and the fixing of the capital at Dacca. While the former act brought back normal life for the people of south Bengal, the latter measure led to the development of eastern Bengal generally, and the city of Dacca in particular. The Mughals built a number of beautiful architectural structures at Dacca and elsewhere in Bengal, some of which exist still today. On the international plane, however, the period of Mughal rule coincided with the decline of the Portuguese naval power and the appearance in their stead of the Dutch, the French and the English on the scene. The commercial and colonial rivalry of these nations had their inevitable impact on the coastal regions of the Mughal dominions, notably in Bengal. The second half of the seventeenth century, corresponding roughly with the viceroalties of Mīr Jumla and Shāista Khān, witnessed increasing trading activities of these European nations in Bengal. Their efforts to obtain trade privileges and, through them, political and military advantages, occupy much of the story of their relationship with the Mughal viceroys. The first English war in Bengal during Shāista Khān's viceroalty was the beginning of systematic English encroachments in the country's political as well as trade arena. With the foundation of their settlement at Calcutta in 1690 and their obtaining of further advantages during the closing years of Aurangzeb's reign, when he was busy in his Deccan campaigns, the English gained a firm foothold at the mouth of the Hugli river and over the region lying south of Calcutta.

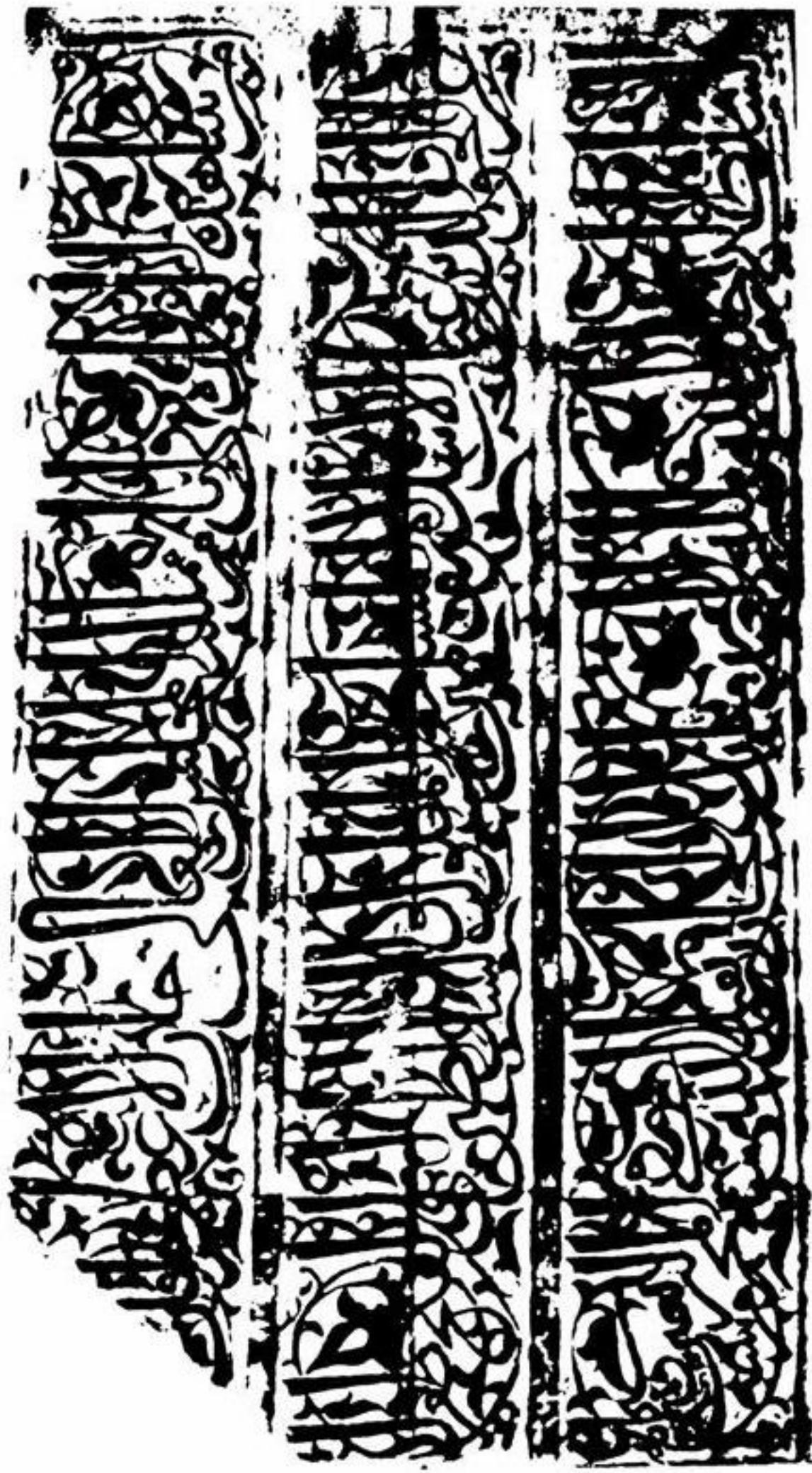
Already before Aurangzeb's death the capital of Bengal was transferred from Dacca to Murshidabad (formerly called Makh-

ṣūṣābād). After the emperor's death Murshid Qulī Khān and his successors became virtually independent of Delhi's control, although they continued to recognize its theoretical sovereignty. The coming of the Mughals had resulted in the former Muslim nobility and princely families being relegated into the background. Since Murshid Qulī Khān's time even the Mughal nobility who had established themselves in Bengal were pushed into the background and their place was taken up by members of the Hindu mercantile class (*bāniā*) who had emerged into prominence and prosperity by working as trade-agents for the European companies, specially of the English. The Murshidabad Nawwābs became practically isolated from the generality of the Muslim population and depended for support partly on fresh arrivals of their kinsmen from Persia and partly on the Hindu mercantile group. The mutual struggles and intrigues of the new Murshidabad Muslim nobility among themselves for power and the *masnad* seriously weakened their position and left the field open for the *bāniā* faction to manipulate the country's political affairs to their own advantage. The English merchant-adventurers were not slow to grasp the significance of the political situation. Soon enough there emerged a natural alliance between them and the Hindu *bāniā* faction which proved to be the main factor behind the overthrow of the last Nawwāb Sirāj al-Daulah in 1757 and the installation of English political authority in Bengal. The end of Muslim rule in the land was the result as much of their own weaknesses and faults as that of the new international situation and the colonial enterprise of the English nation.

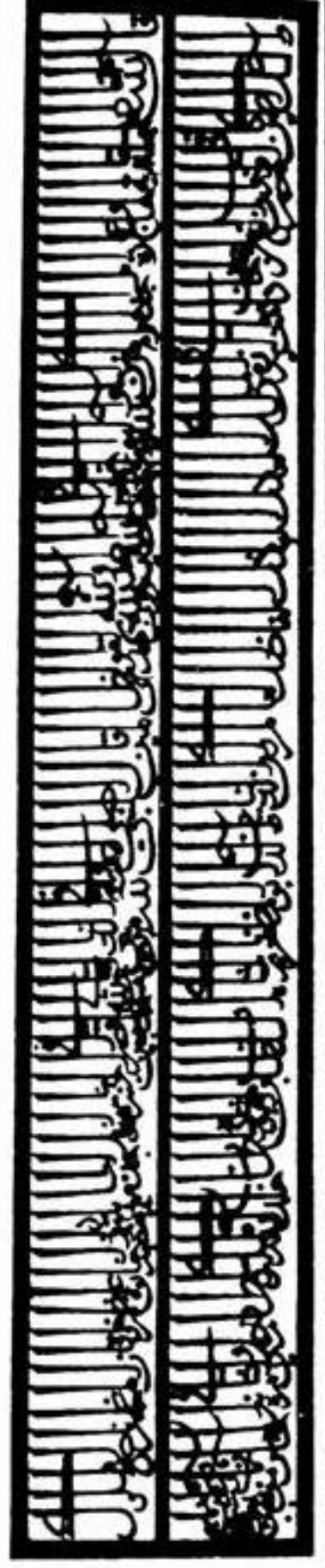
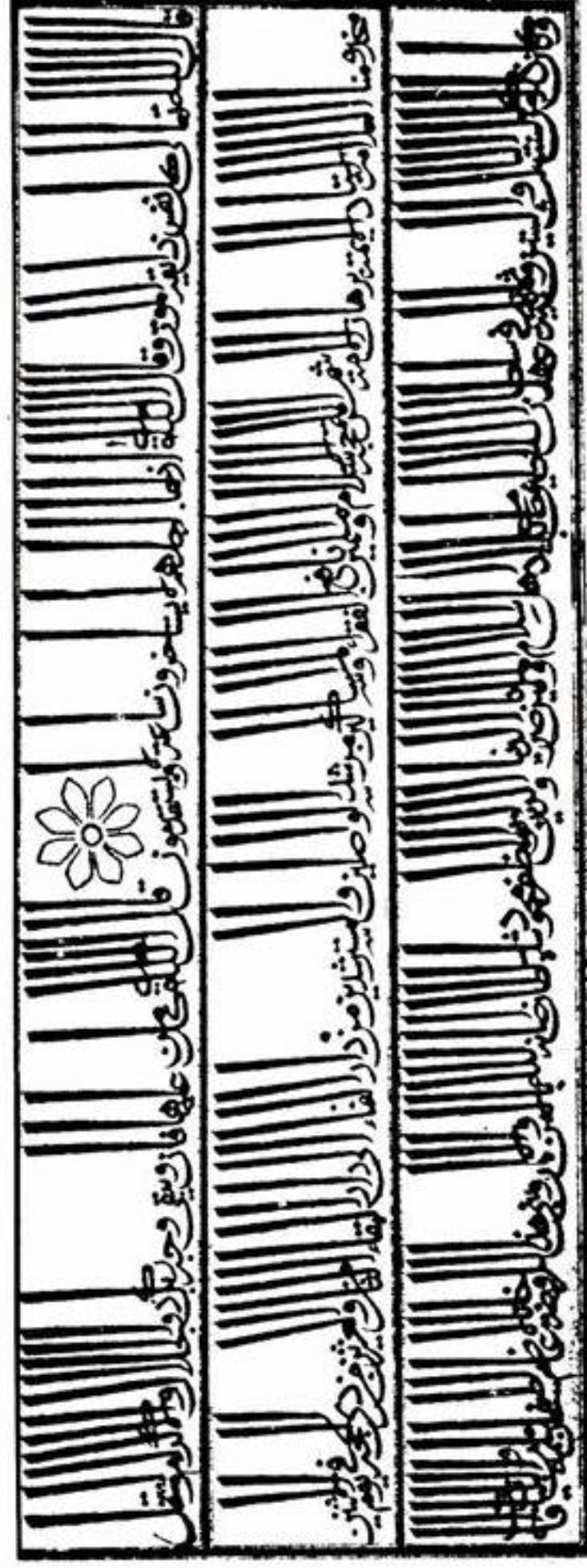
As in the case of every political change, the immediate beneficiaries of the establishment of British rule in the country were, besides the rulers, those who cooperated with the new regime. As for the Muslims and the country in general there began a period of steady decline. For about a quarter of a century after the fall of Sirāj al-Daulah Bengal was the scene of unprecedented and one of the worst types of exploitations known to history. Famine, pestilence and poverty engulfed the land before the century was over. As British rule became firmly established there was naturally an abatement in the process of

unbridled exploitation and attempts were made by the rulers to render their administration salutary and palatable. From the nineteenth century onwards there were also beneficial intellectual contacts with the west. In course of time the western ideas of liberalism and nationalism had a good deal to do with the socio-political evolution of the subcontinent. Nevertheless, these ideas touched but the fringe of a slowly emerging and very limited urban society. When the British occupied Bengal it was, according to their own accounts, the wealthiest and most prosperous province in the subcontinent; when they left it in the mid-twentieth century it was the poorest of all. They found it a united land; they left it divided. And inspite of their efforts at education more than 90 per cent of the population remained illiterate. Nor was the education system devised by the rulers calculated to build up a balanced and useful manpower. British rule in the land had of course good and bad results, and the fall of Sirāj al-Daulah did indeed mark the beginning of a new era; but to regard it as a "glorious dawn" or "truly a renaissance", as one scholar describes it,¹ is doubtless an exaggeration of the benefits of British rule and an over-simplification of the import of renaissance.

¹ Sir J.N. Sarkar, *H.B.*, II, 497, 498.

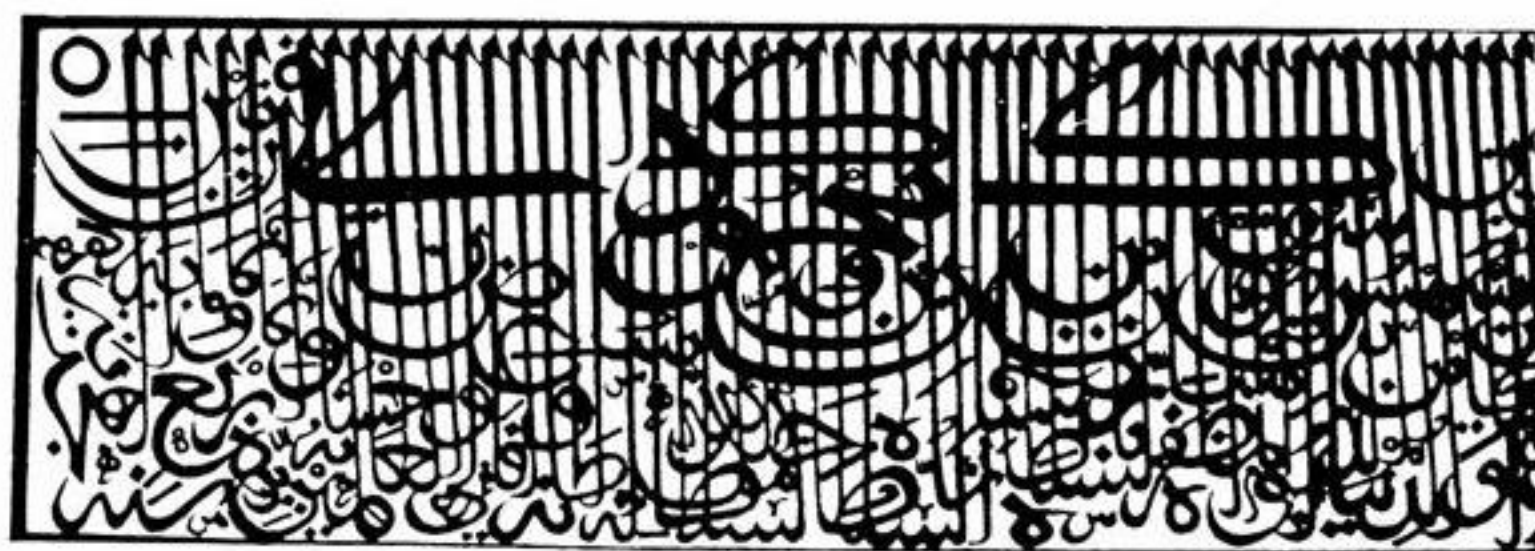
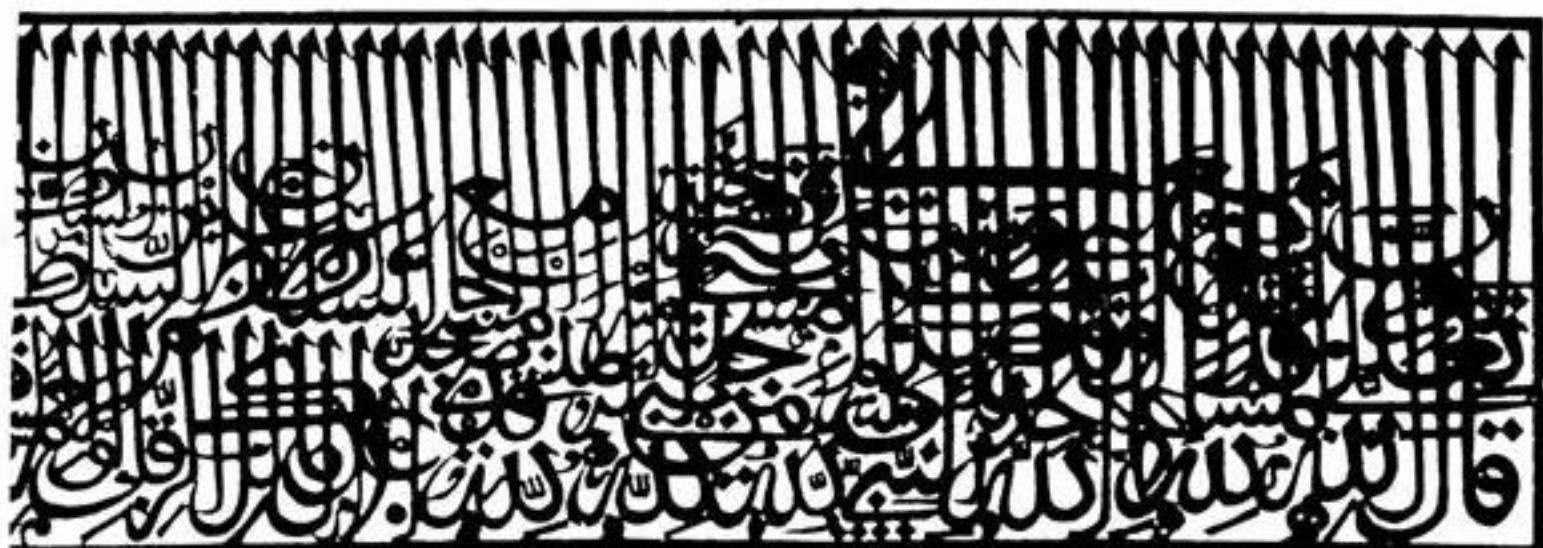


Izz al-Din Fughra's Bari Dargah (Bihar) Inscription dated 640 H.
(Reproduced from S. Ahmed, *Inscriptions of Bengal*, Vol. IV, Varendra Research
Museum, Rajshahi, 1960, Fig. 1).



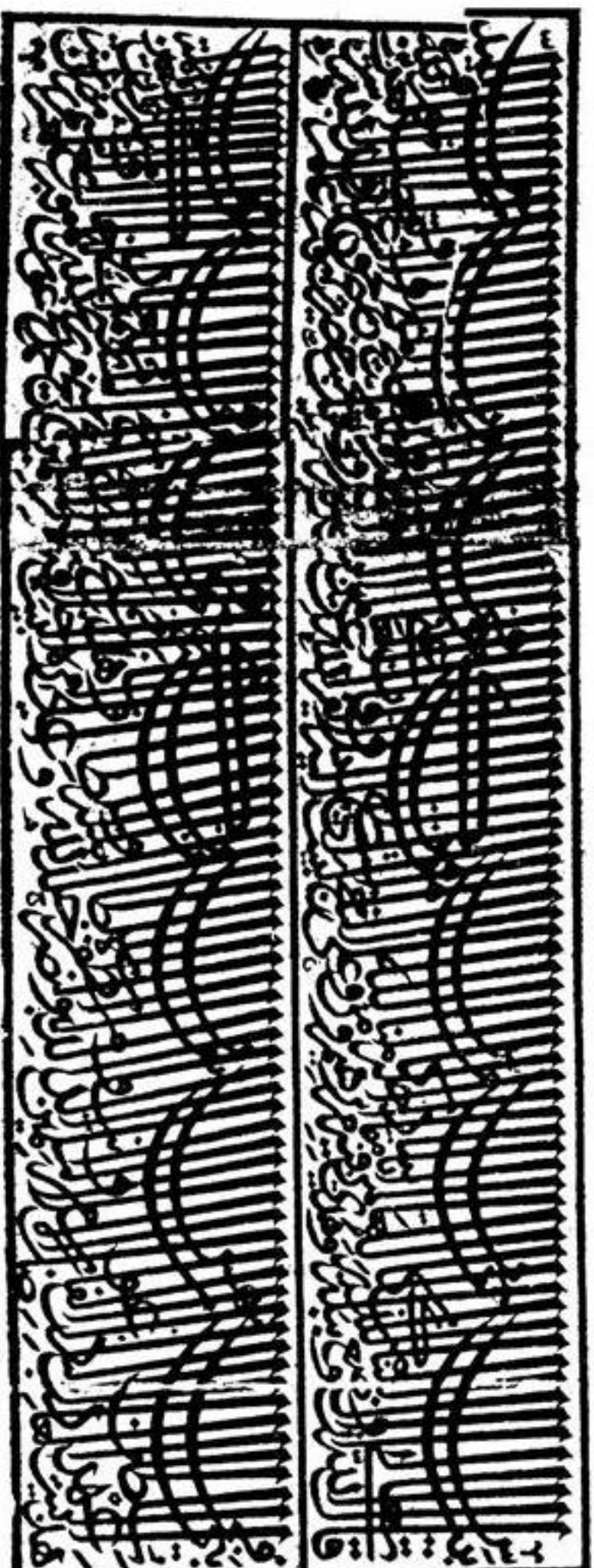
(a) Gaud Inscription of Nāsir al-Dīn Mahmūd Shāh (I) dated 863 H. (Reproduced from S. Ahmed, *Inscriptions of Bengal*, Vol. IV, Varendra Research Museum, Rajshahi, 1960, Fig. 20).

(b) Deotala Inscription of Bārbaḳ Shāh dated 868 H. (Reproduced from *Memoirs*, p. 84).



Darāsbārī Inscription of Yūsuf Shāh dated 884. (Reproduced from *Memoris*, Fig. III).

PLATE XV.



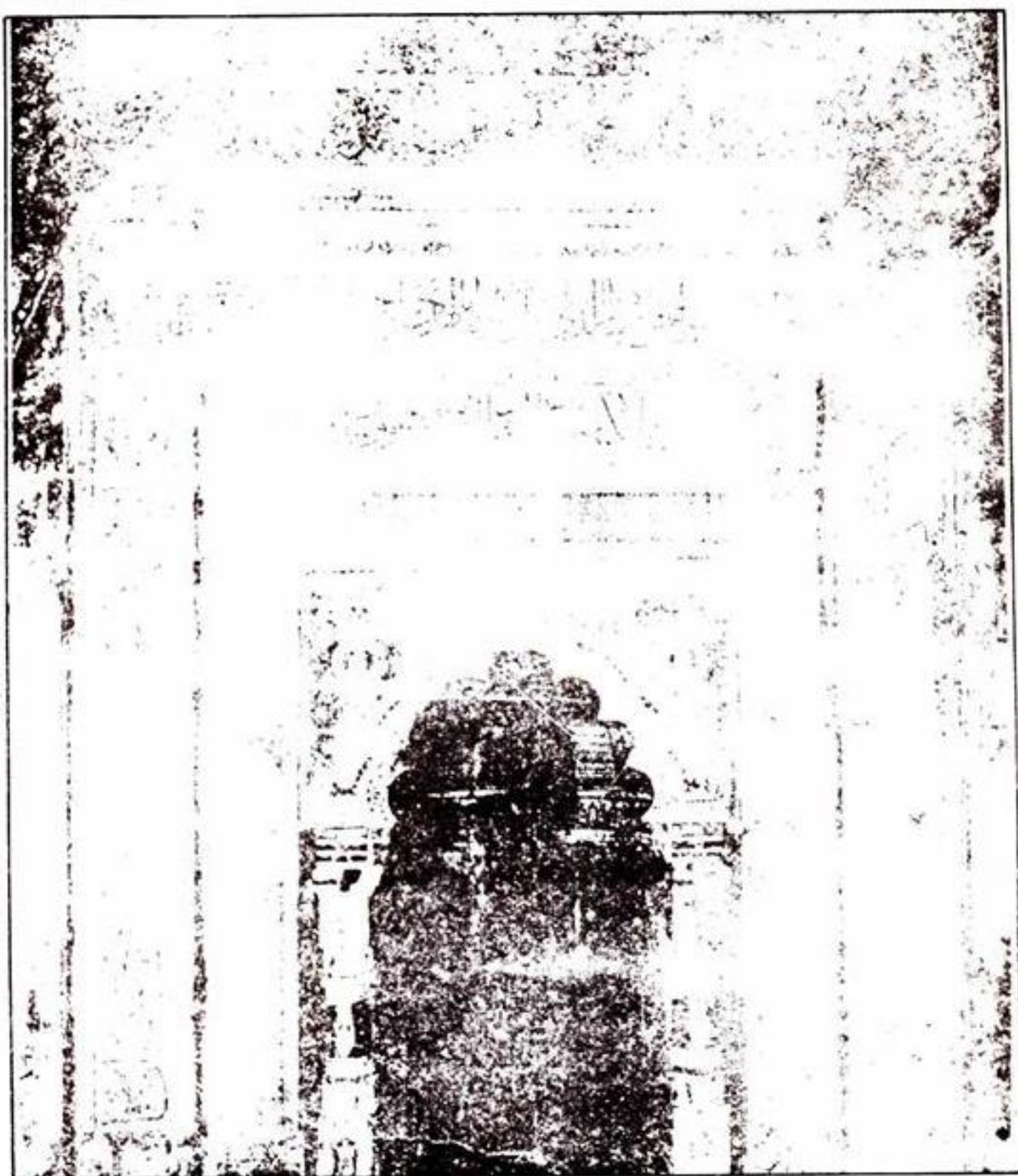
Hadrat Pandua Inscription of Shams al-Din Muzaffar Shāh dated 898 H. (Reproduced from S. Ahmed, *Inscriptions of Bengal*, Vol. IV, Varendra Research Museum, Rajshahi, 1960, Fig. 35).

شَهِدَ الشَّاهُ بِمَنَاسِكَتِهَا وَبِأَمْرِهَا
 بِرَأْسِهَا وَبِأَمْرِهَا وَبِأَمْرِهَا
 رَحِمَتْ لَهَا الطَّبِيعَةُ السَّمَنَاءُ بِرَأْسِهَا
 مَعَ وَكَلِّهَا وَبِأَمْرِهَا وَبِأَمْرِهَا
 مَوْدَانِهَا وَبِأَمْرِهَا وَبِأَمْرِهَا
 مَشْرِطِهَا وَبِأَمْرِهَا وَبِأَمْرِهَا
 وَحُجْرَتِهَا وَبِأَمْرِهَا وَبِأَمْرِهَا
 مَسْتَأْنِفَتِهَا وَبِأَمْرِهَا وَبِأَمْرِهَا
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The original is in the British Museum.
 Reproduced by permission of the British Museum.

Published by the British Museum Press, London.

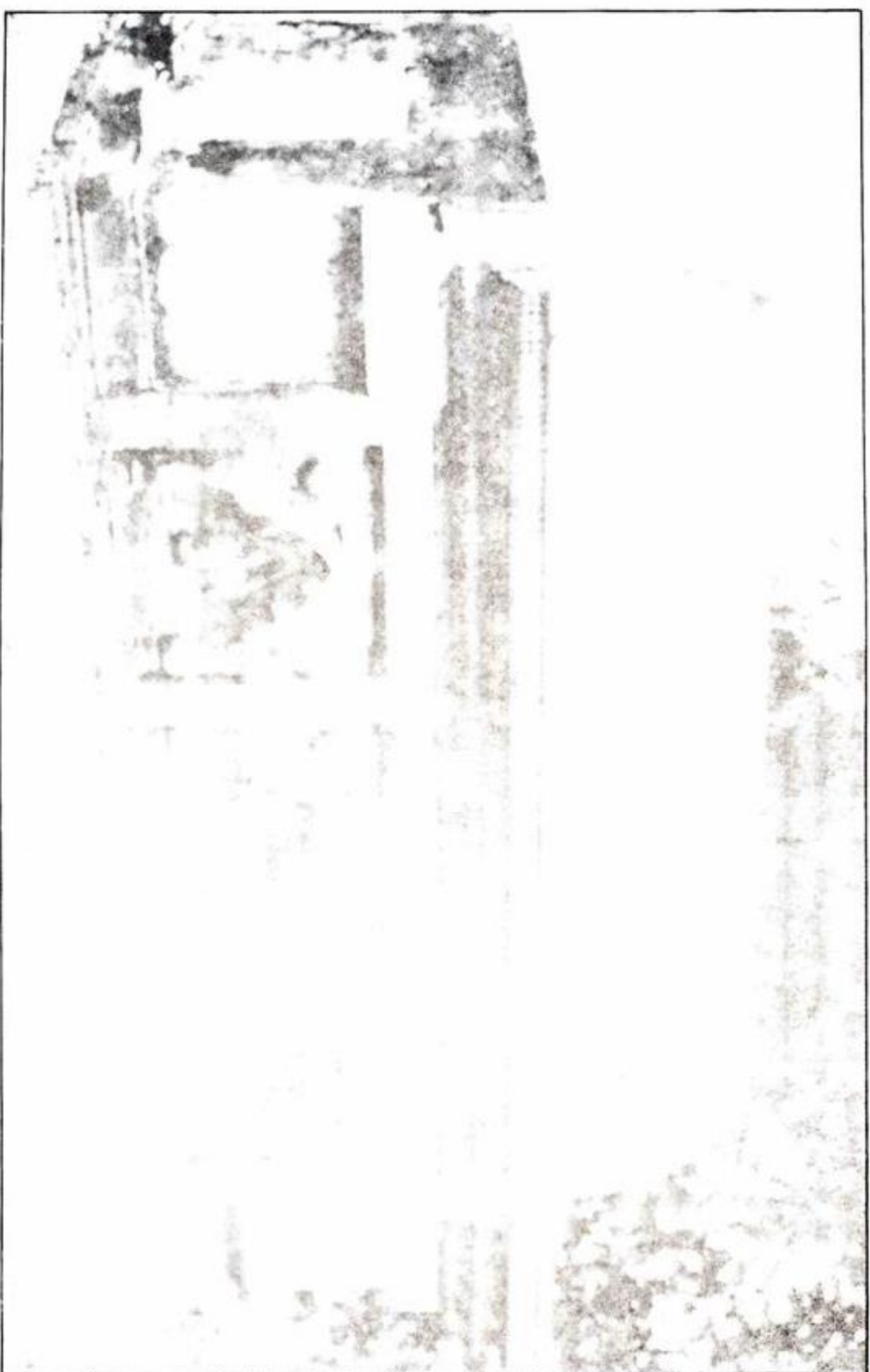
Bara Kātra (Dacca) Inscription of the time of Prince Shujā' dated 1055 H. (Reproduced from D'Oyly, *Antiquities of Dacca*, No. 3, London 1825, preserved in the British Museum (pressmark 1788. c.3). With the kind permission of the British Library (British Museum), London).



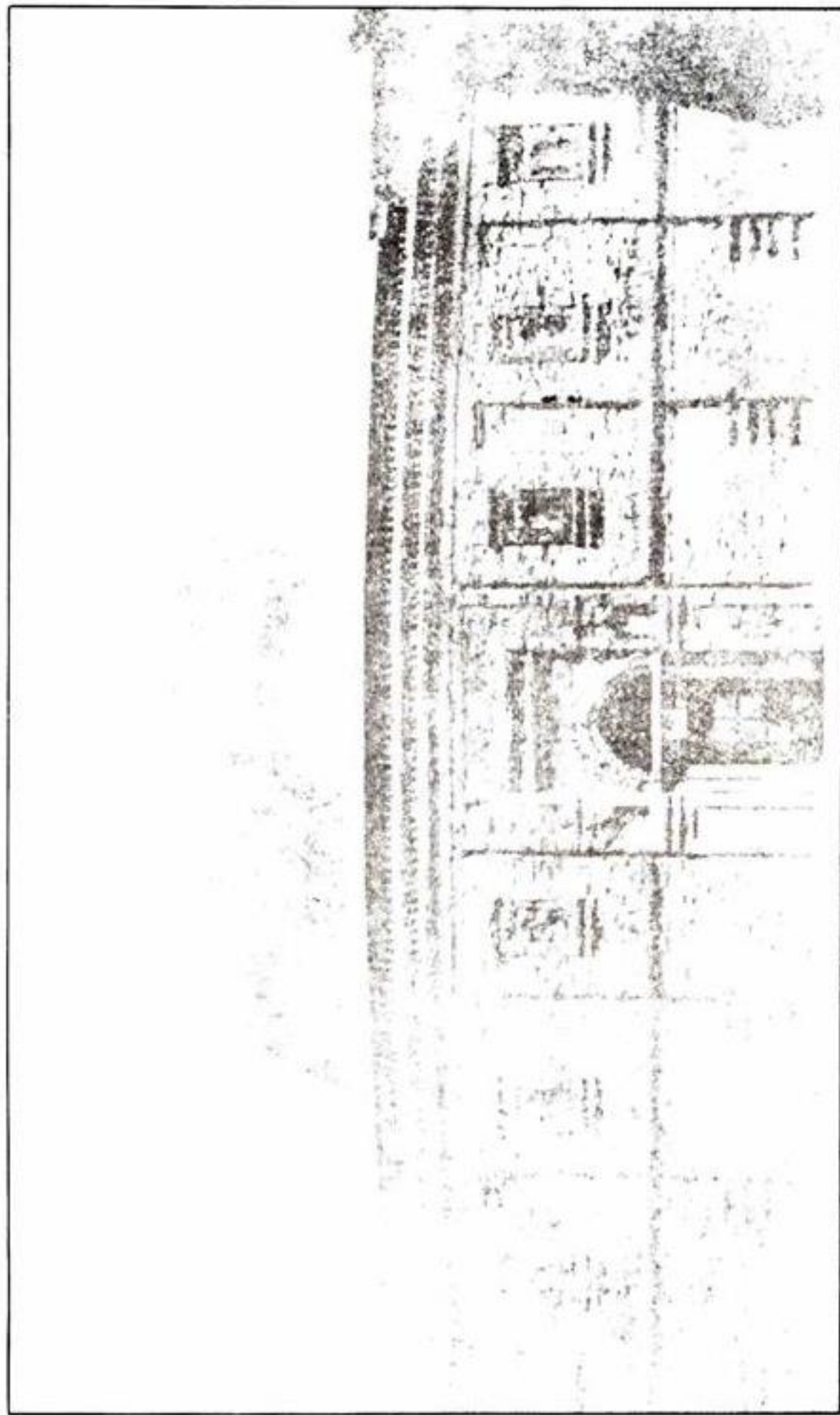
Details of *Mihrab* of the Badshah-ka-Takht, Adina Mosque. (Reproduced from *Memoirs*, Fig. 28).



Tomb of Ghivath al-Dm A'zam Shah at Samargan, as seen by James Wise in 1874 (Reproduced from *JASB*, 1874, Part I, Pl. VIII)

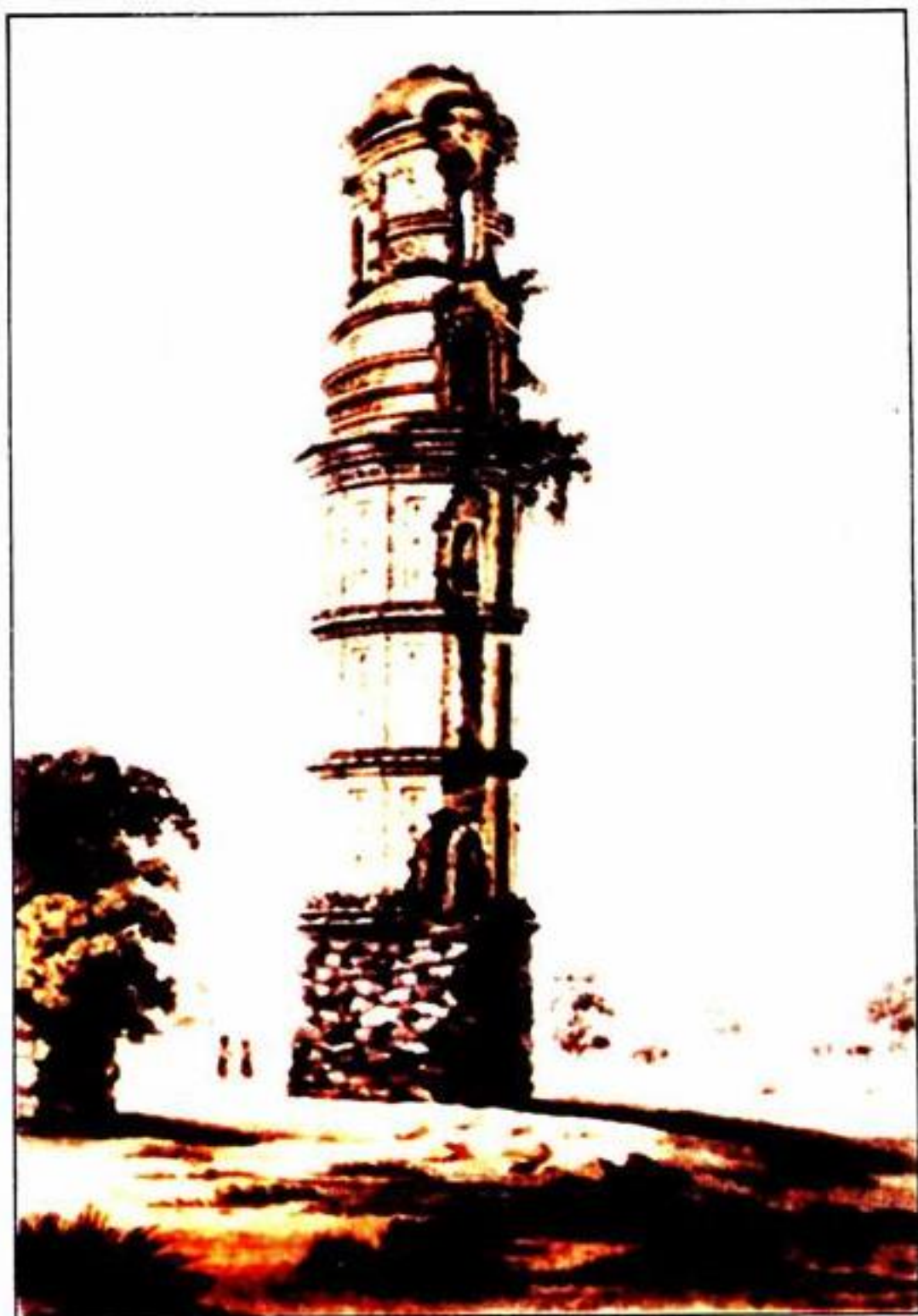


Tomb of Ghuyath al-Din A'zam Shah (after restoration). (By courtesy of the Bangladesh Puratan Corporation).

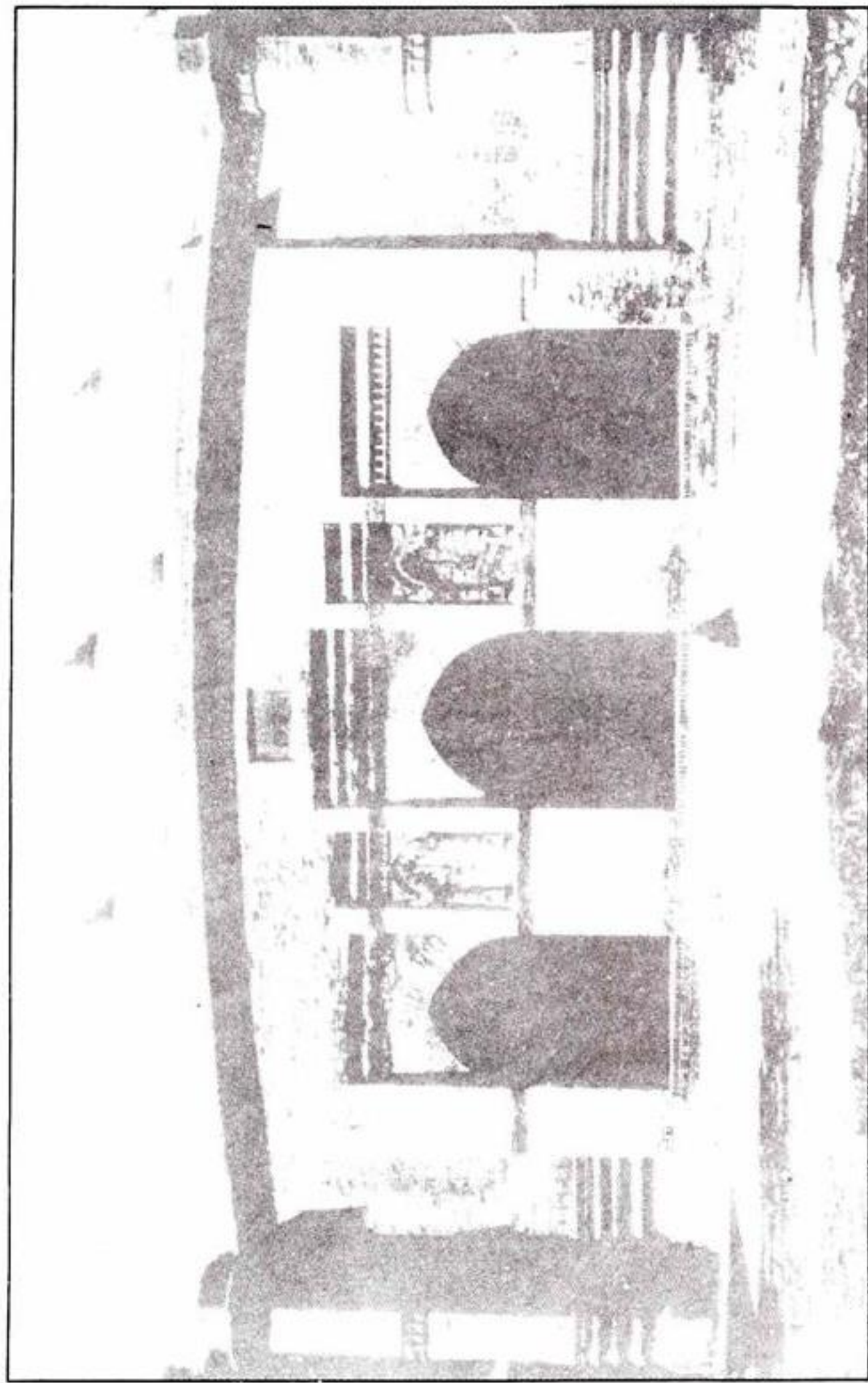


The Eklakhi Mausoleum at Pandua (78' 6" x 74' 6"). (Reproduced from *Memiors*, Fig. 23).

PLATE XXIII.

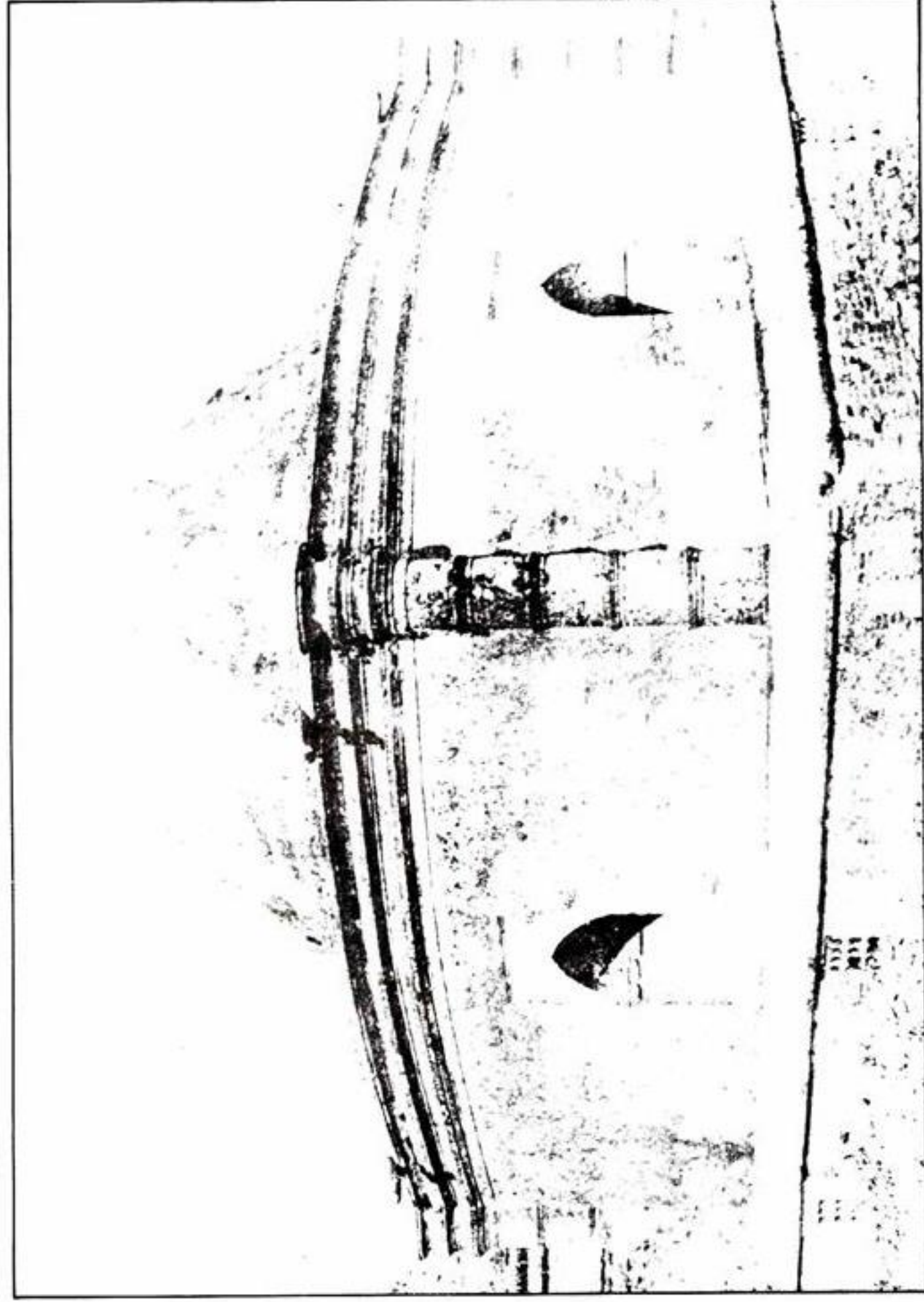


Firūz Minar, Gaud as seen by Creghton early in the 19th century.
(Reproduced by kind permission of the India Office (Foreign and
Commonwealth Relations Office) Library, London).

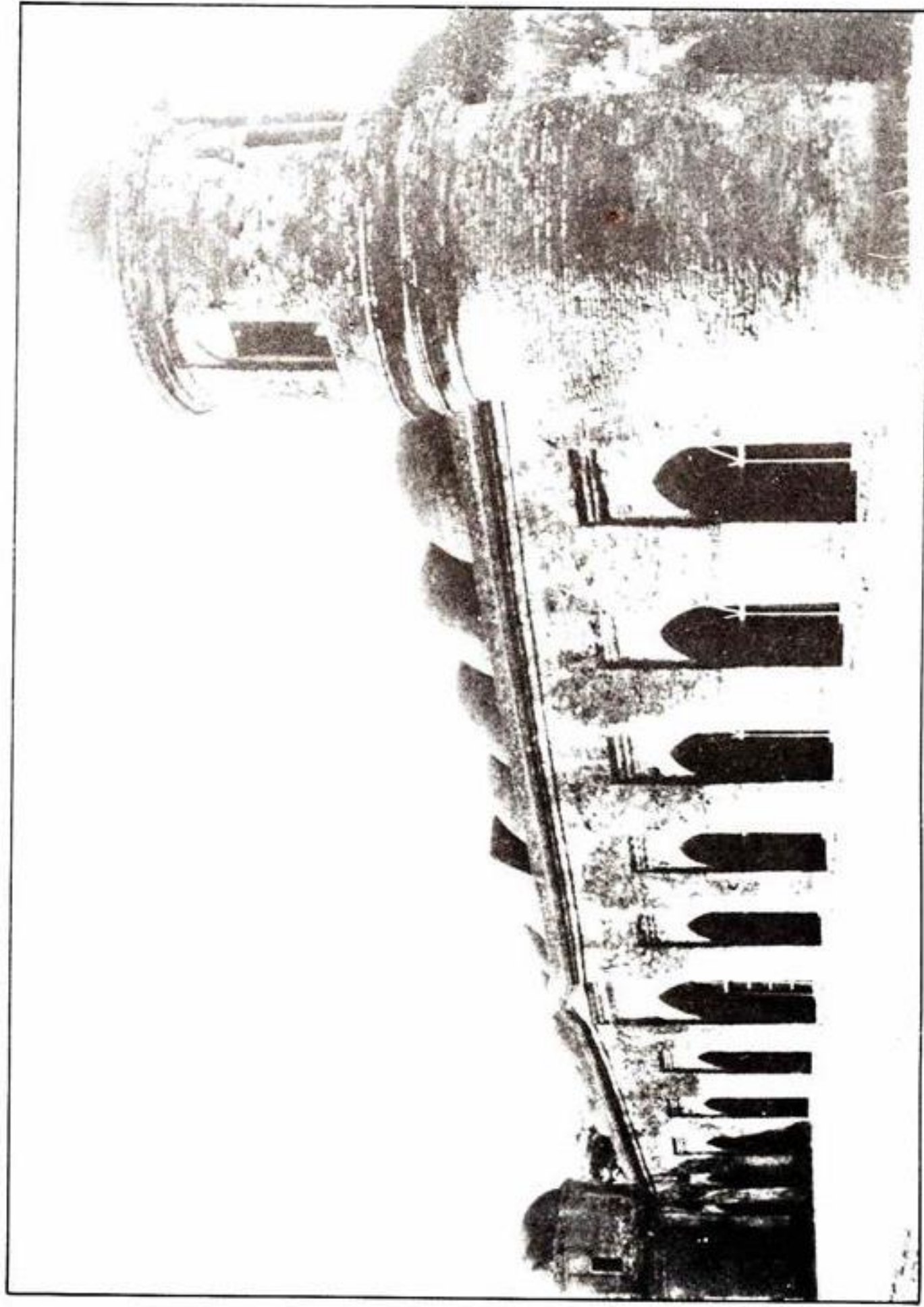


Bābā Ādam's Mosque, Rampal, Dacca, built in 888/1483 (Reproduced from *M.A.A.T.P.*, Pl. 19).

PLATE XXV.



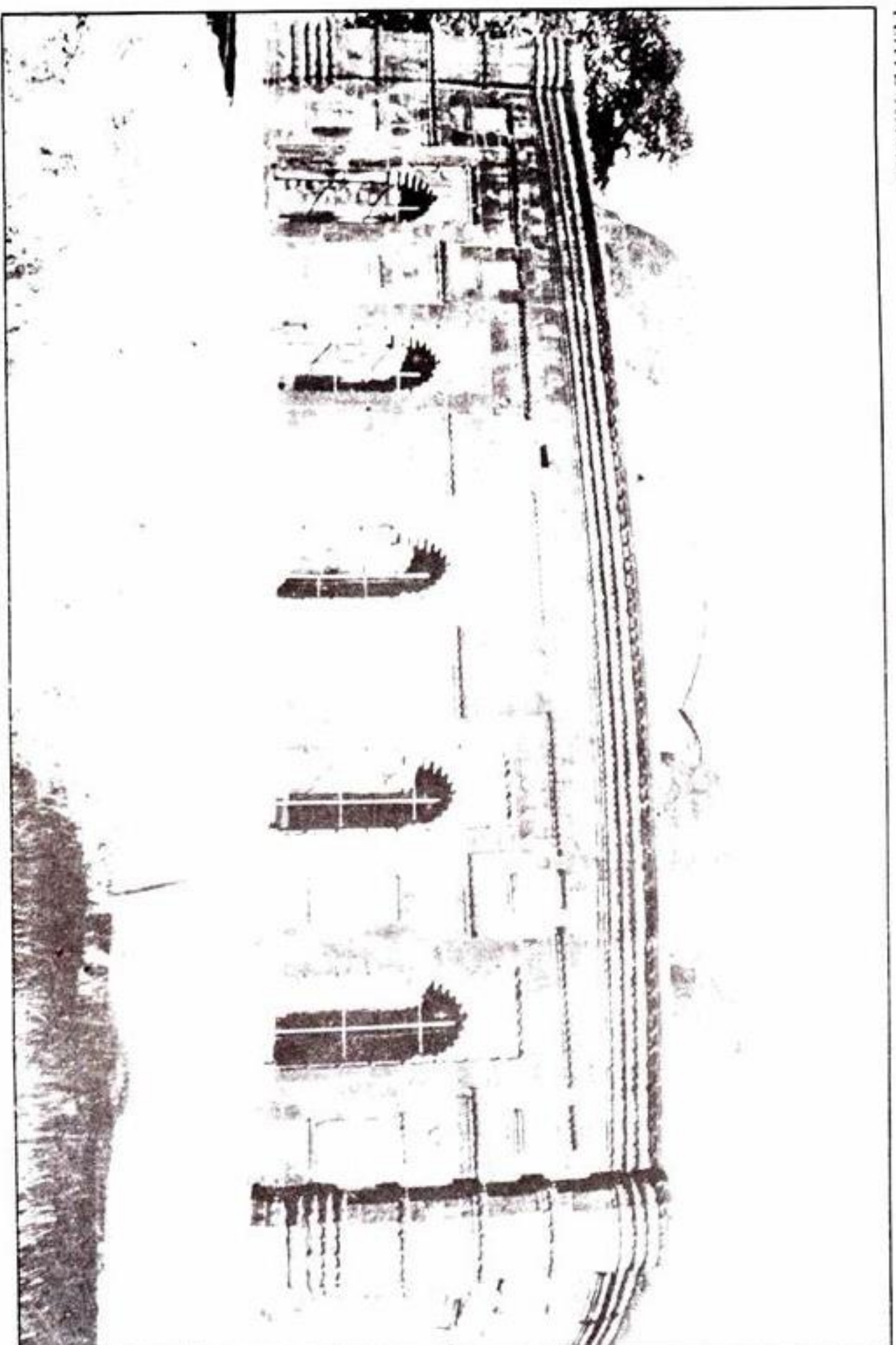
Tomb of Khān Jahan (d. 863/1459) at Bagerhat. (Reproduced from *M.A.A.T.P.*, Pl. 24).



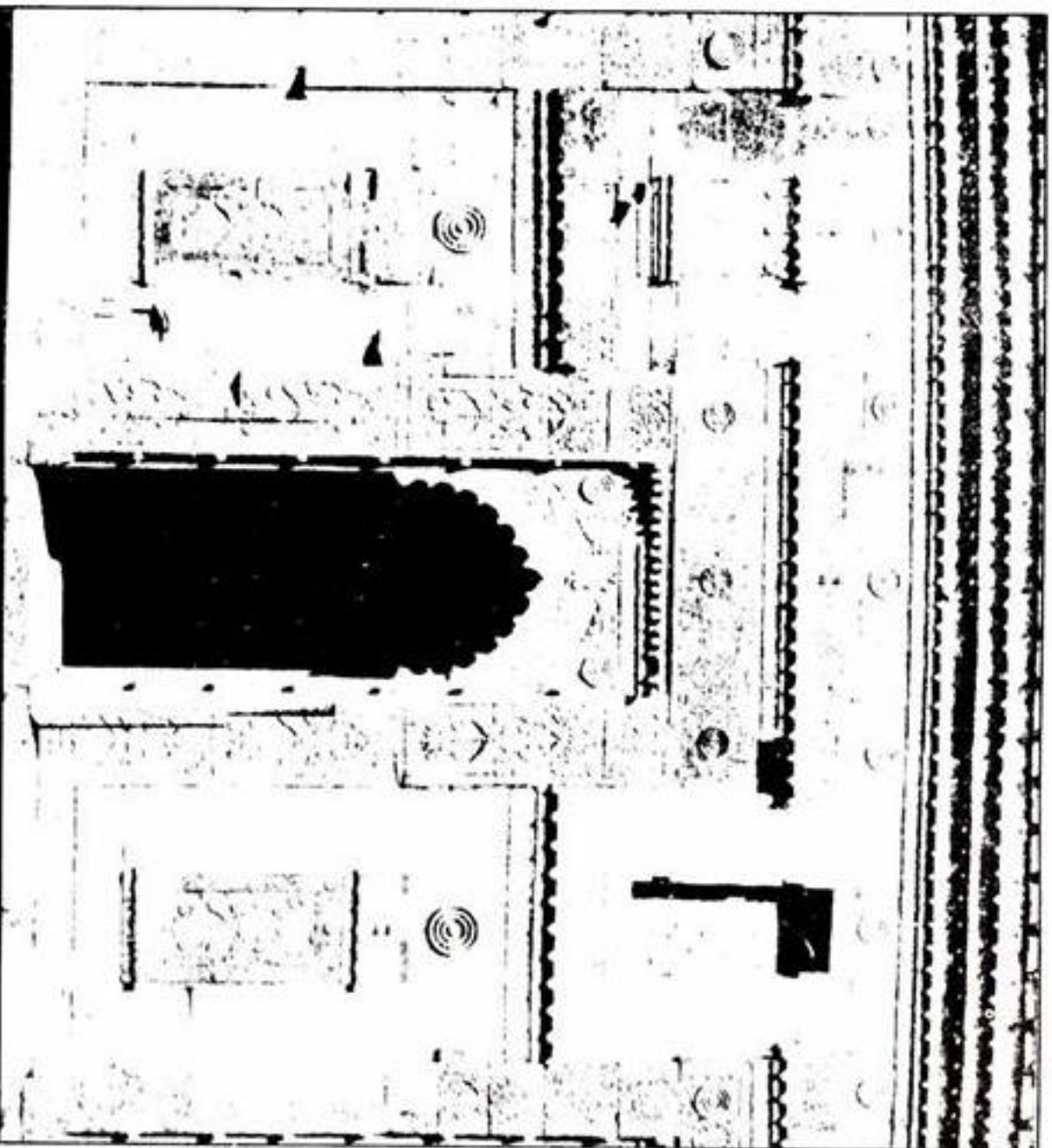
Shat Gumbad (Sixty-domed) Mosque, Bagherhat, built by Khan Jahan (d. 863/1459).
(Reproduced from *M.A.A. I.P.*, Pl. 20).



Shat Gumbad (Sixty-domed) Mosque: interior view. (By courtesy of the Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation).

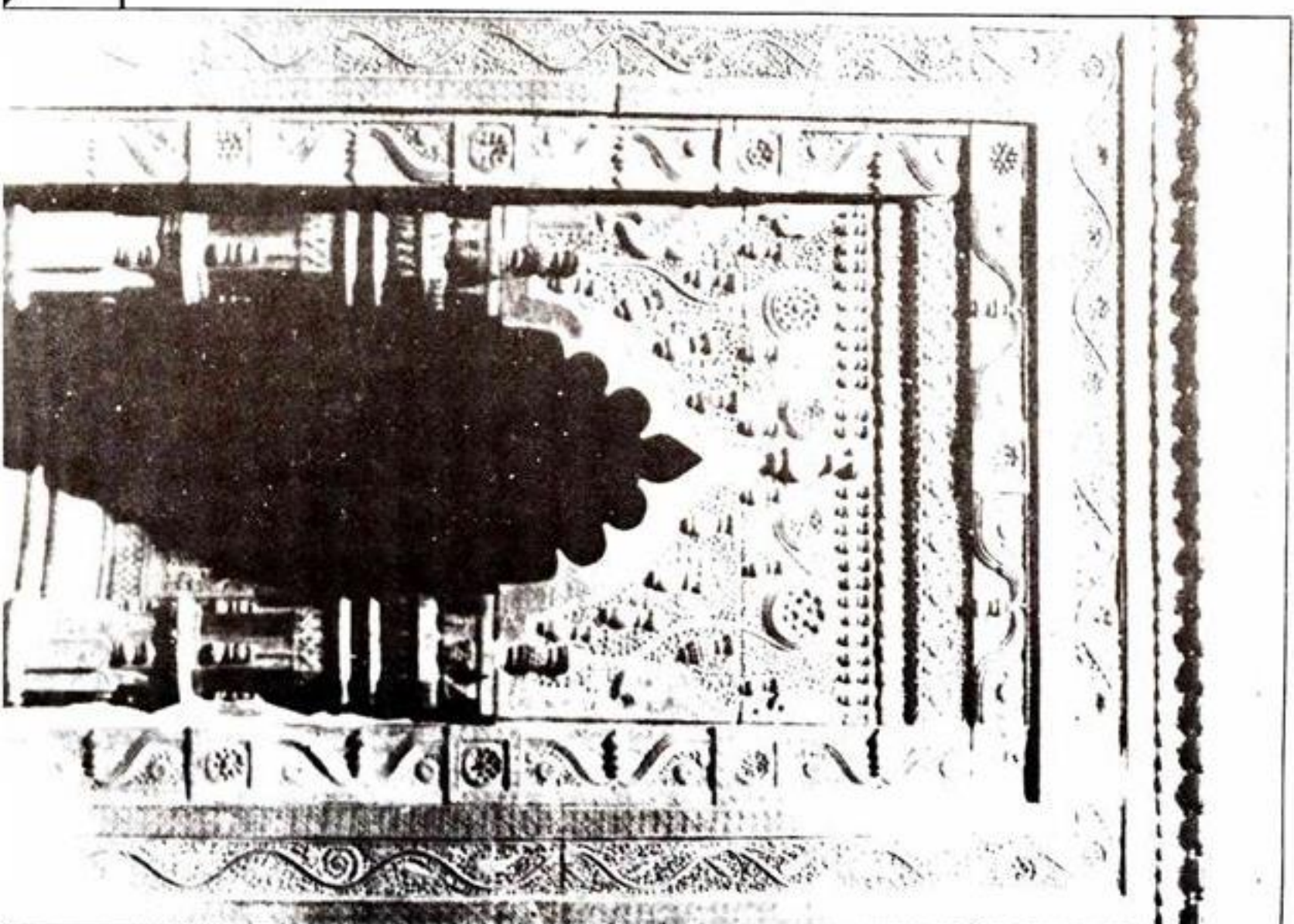


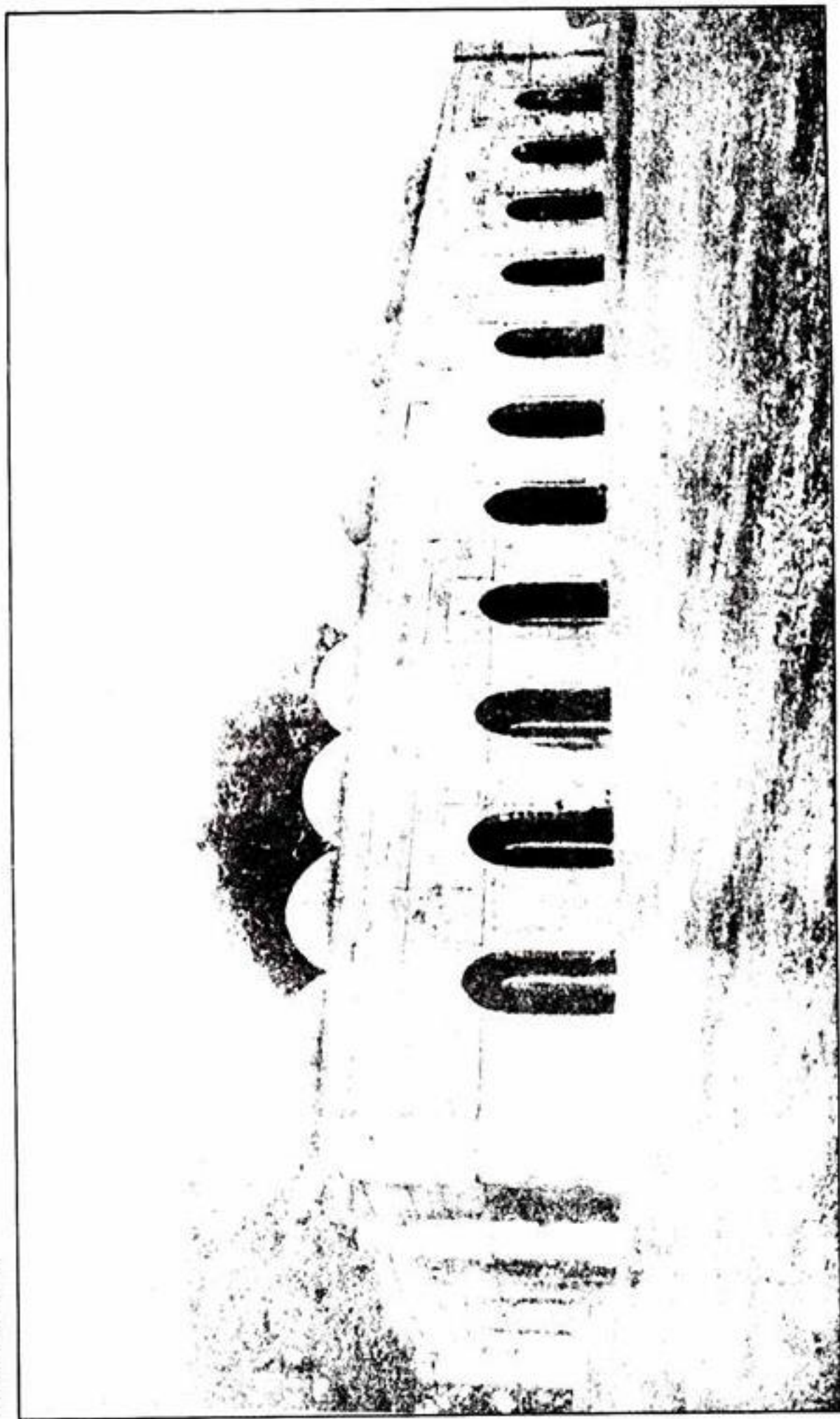
Chora Soná (Small golden) Mosque, Candia, built during the reign of 'Alī' al-Dīn Husam Shāh. (Reproduced from *M.A.A.T.P.*, pl. 18)



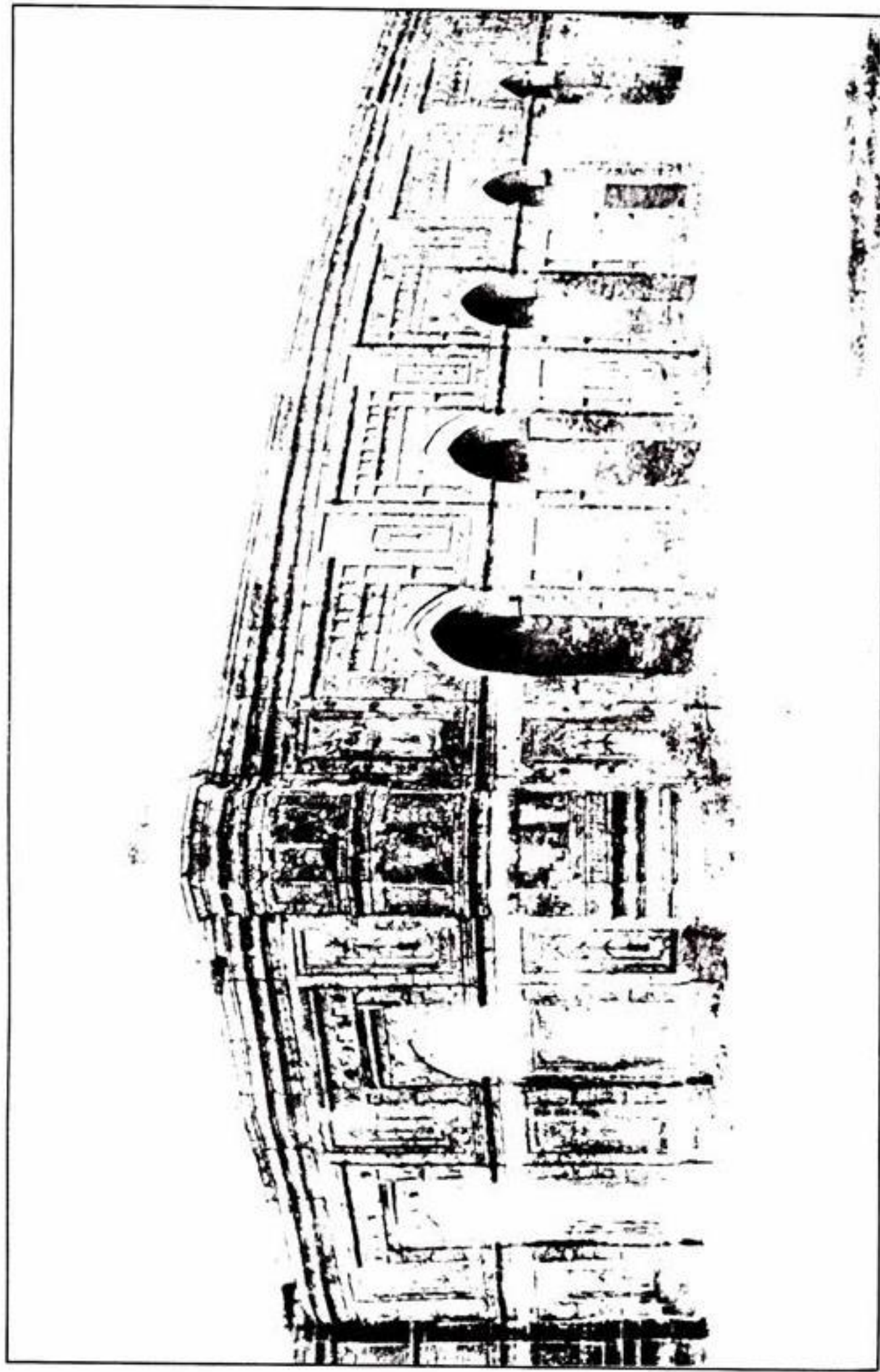
(a) Details of ornamentation round the doors of the Chota Sonā Mosque. (Reproduced from *Memoirs*, Fig. 2).

(b) Stone carving on the central *mihrāb*, Kusumba Mosque, Rajshahi. (Reproduced from *M.A.A.T.P.*, Pl. 17).

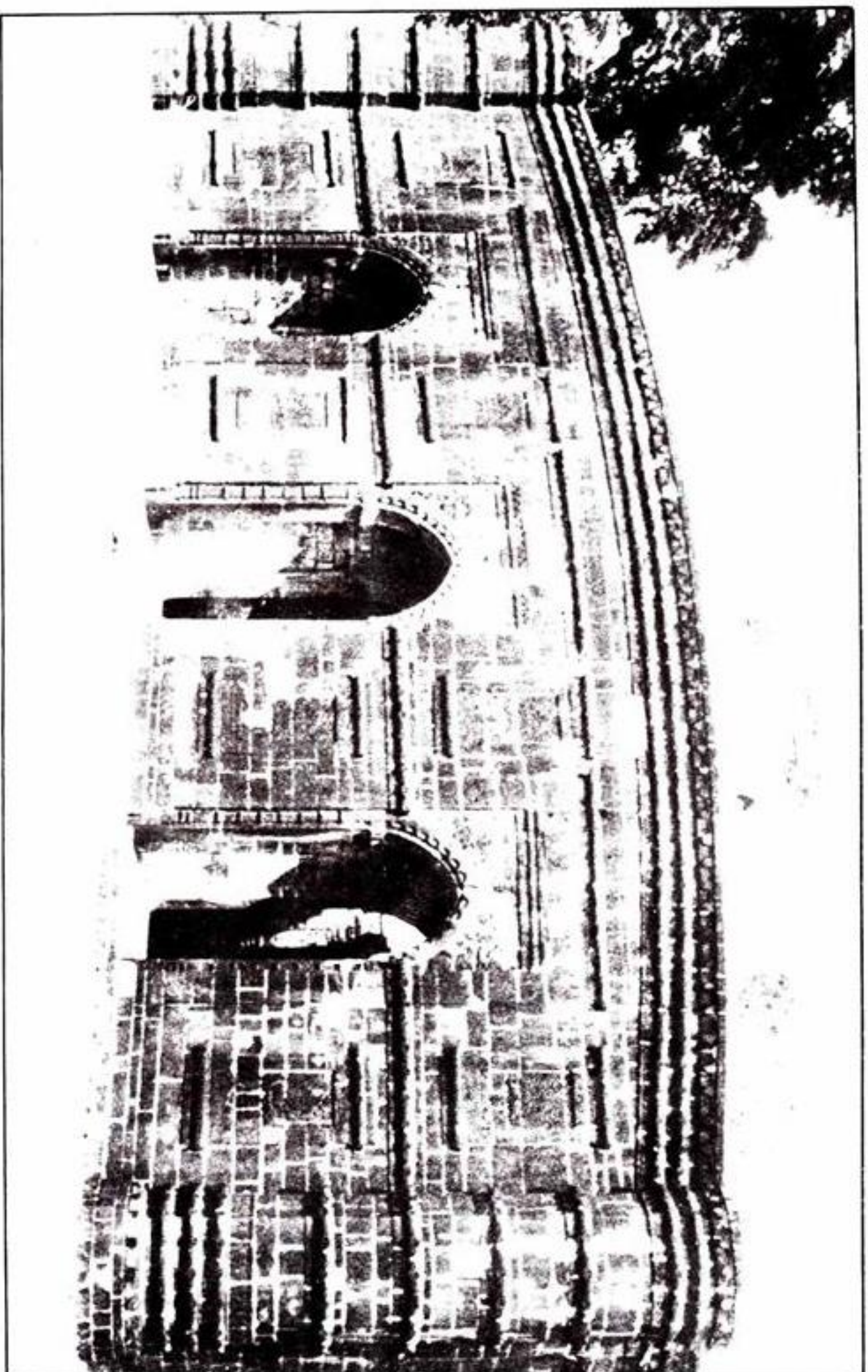




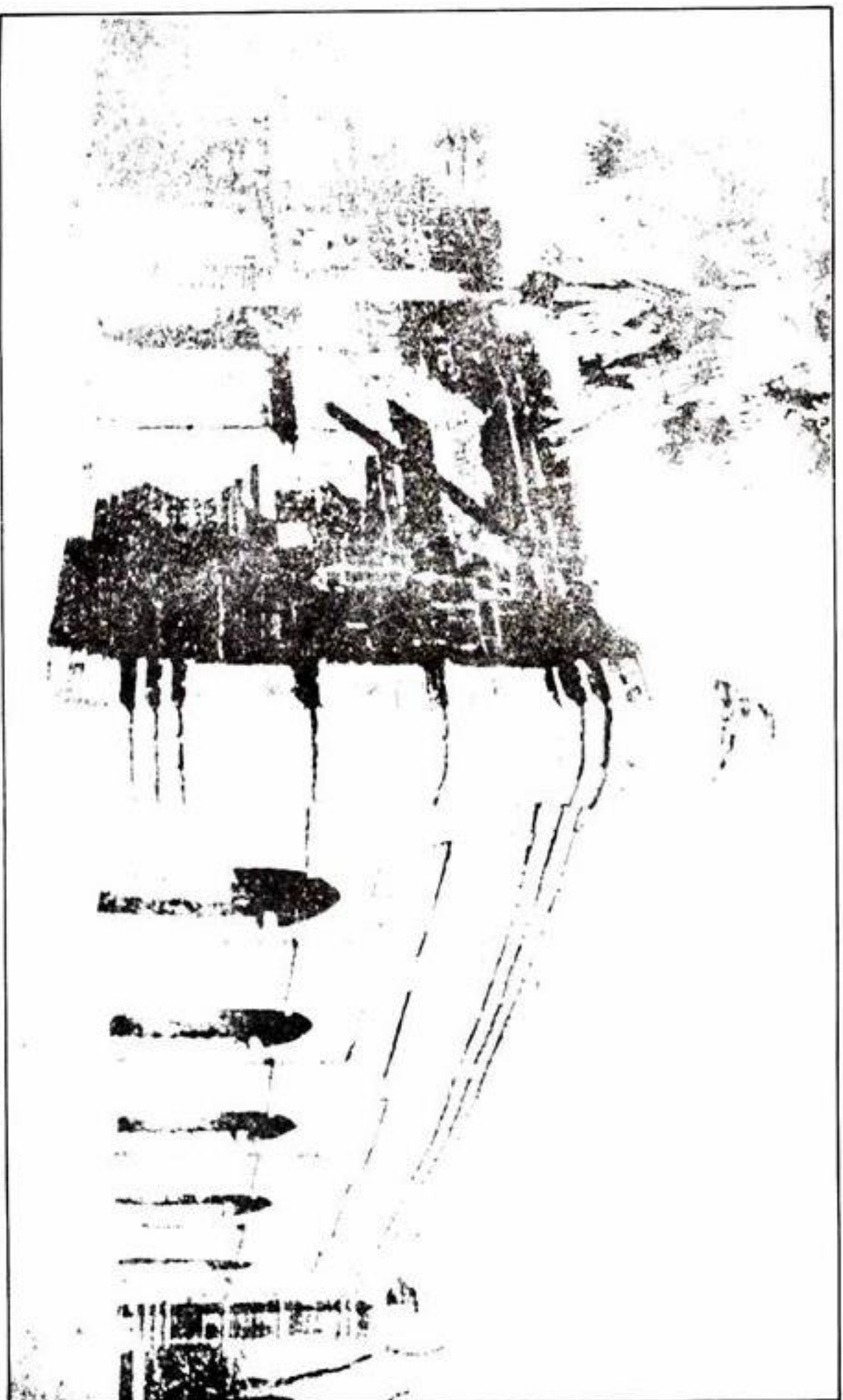
The Great Golden (Bara Sona) Mosque, Gaud, built by Nusrat Shah in 932/1526.
(Reproduced from *Memoirs*, Fig. 8).



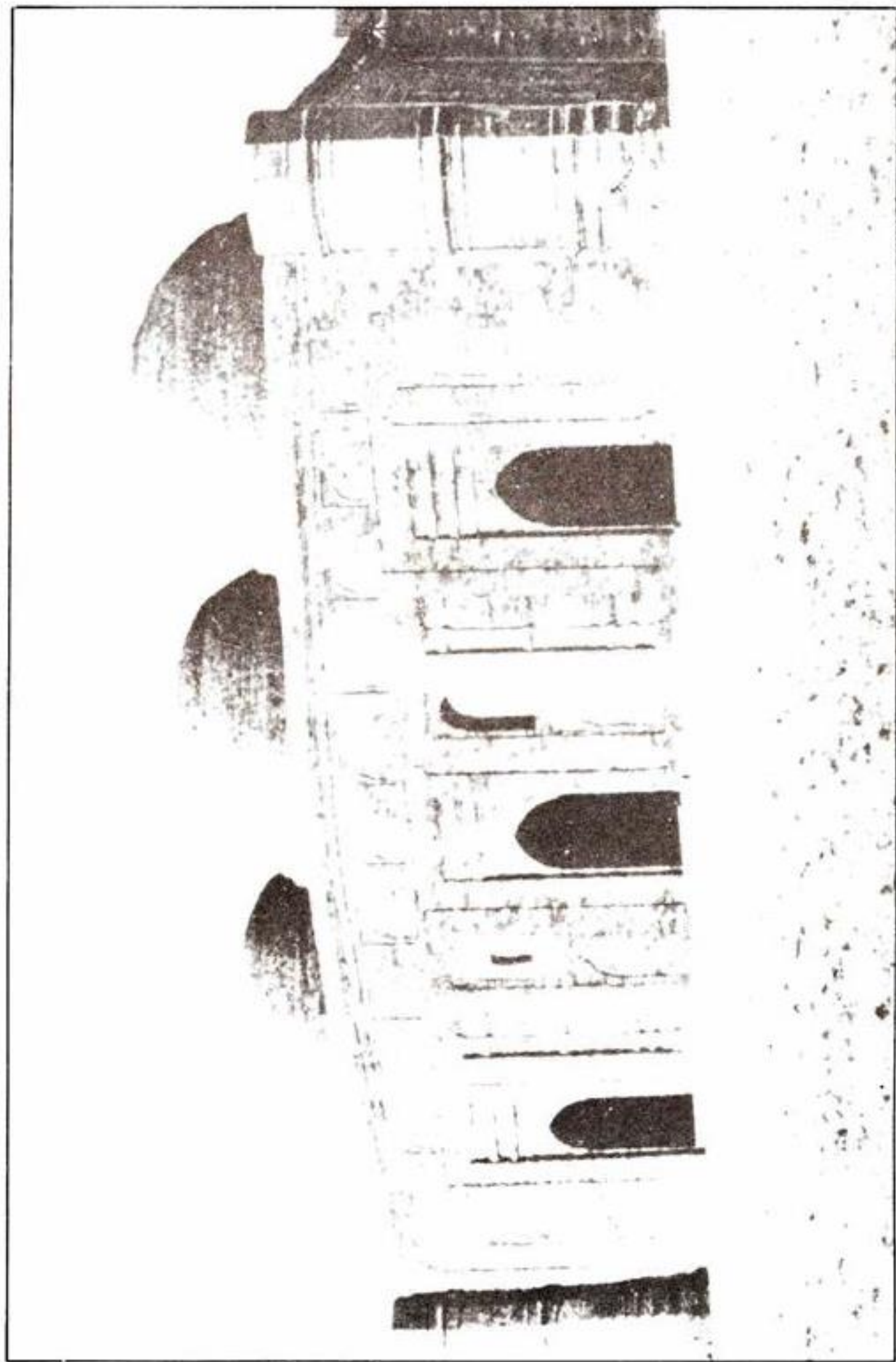
Bāghā Mosque, Rajshahi (75' 8" x 42' 2"), built by Nusrāt Shāh in 930/1528. (Reproduced from *M.A.A.T.P.*, Pl. 19a).



Kusumba Mosque, Rajshahi, built in 966/1558 (58' x 18'). (Reproduced from *M.A.A.I.P.*, pl. 16a).

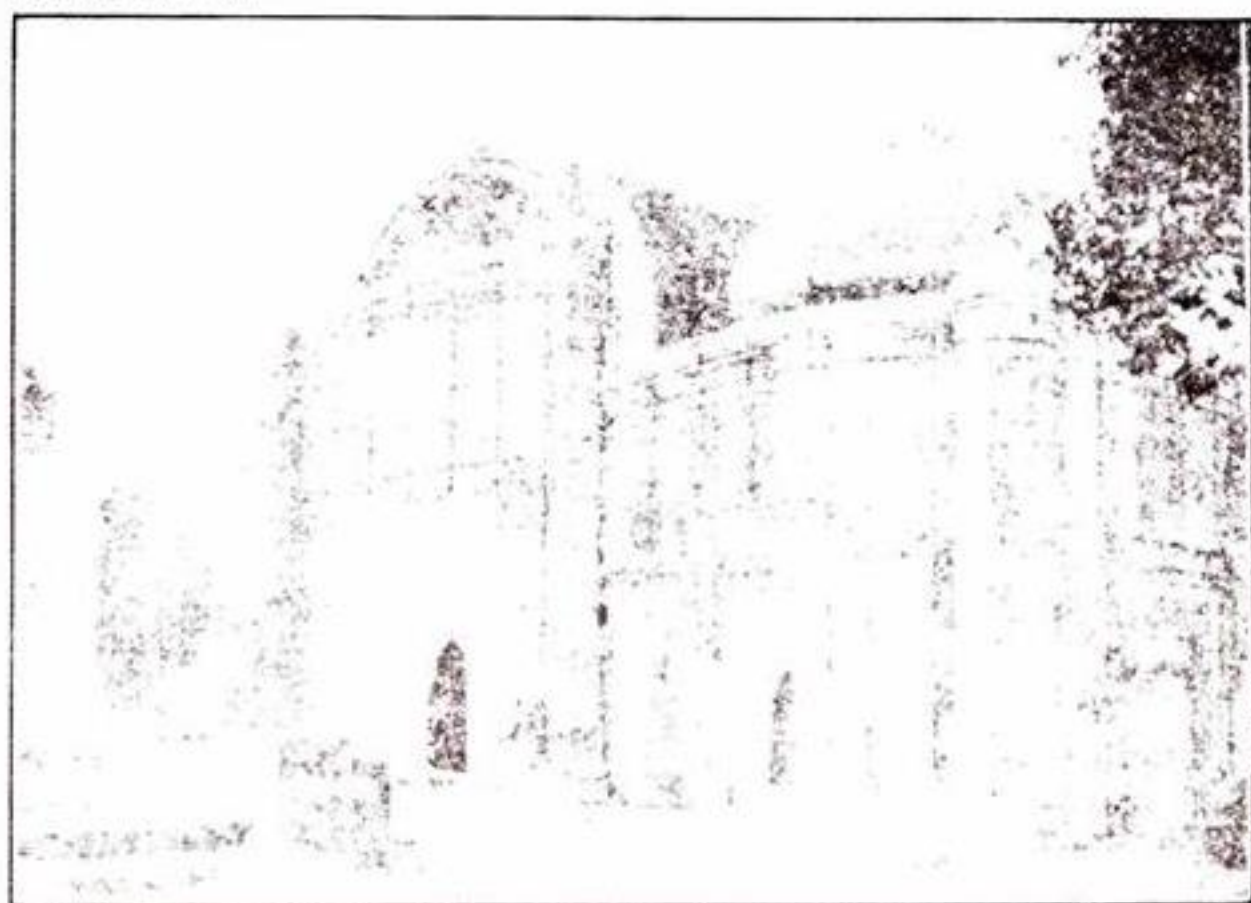


Quib Shahi Mosque, Hadrat Pandua, built in 990-1582 (82' 6" x 37' 8"). (Reproduced from *Memoirs*, p. 121).

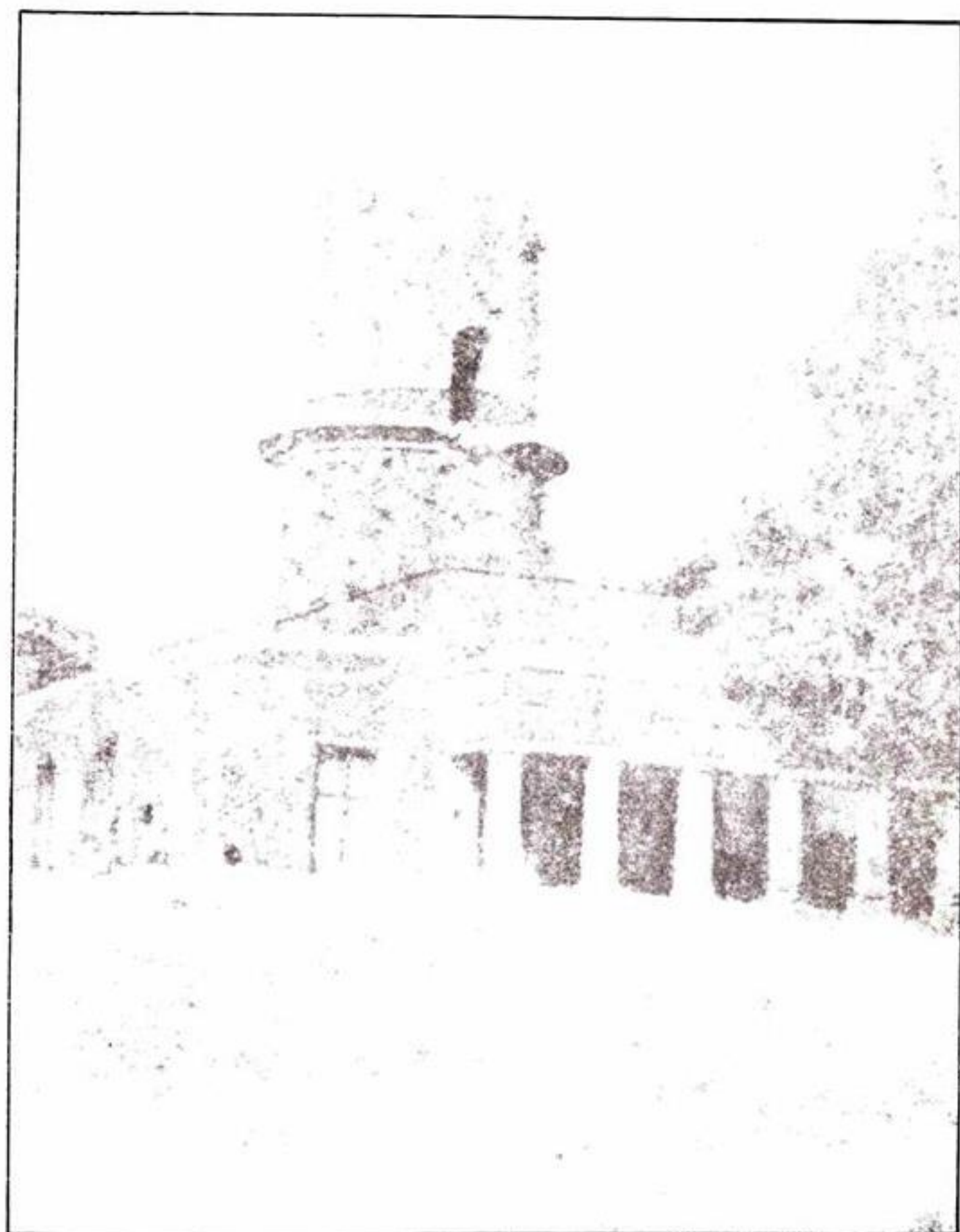


Kusumba Mosque, Rajshahi, built in 966/1558 (58' x 18'). (Reproduced from *M.A.A.T.P.*, Pl. 16a).

PLATE XXXV

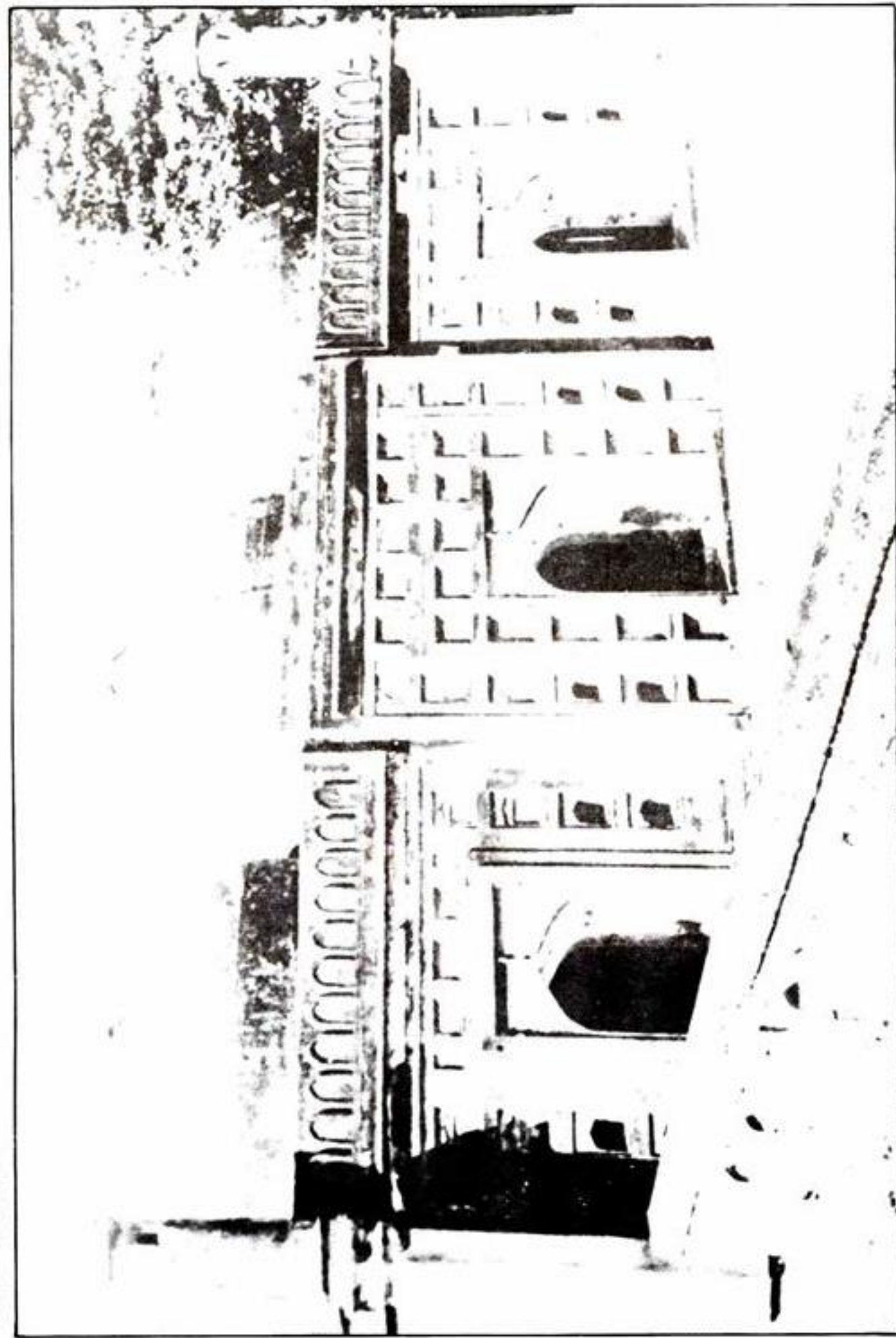


*Linné Mosque, Old Makkah, built in 1004-1590. 72' x 27'. Reproduced from *Mémours*, Fig. 31.*

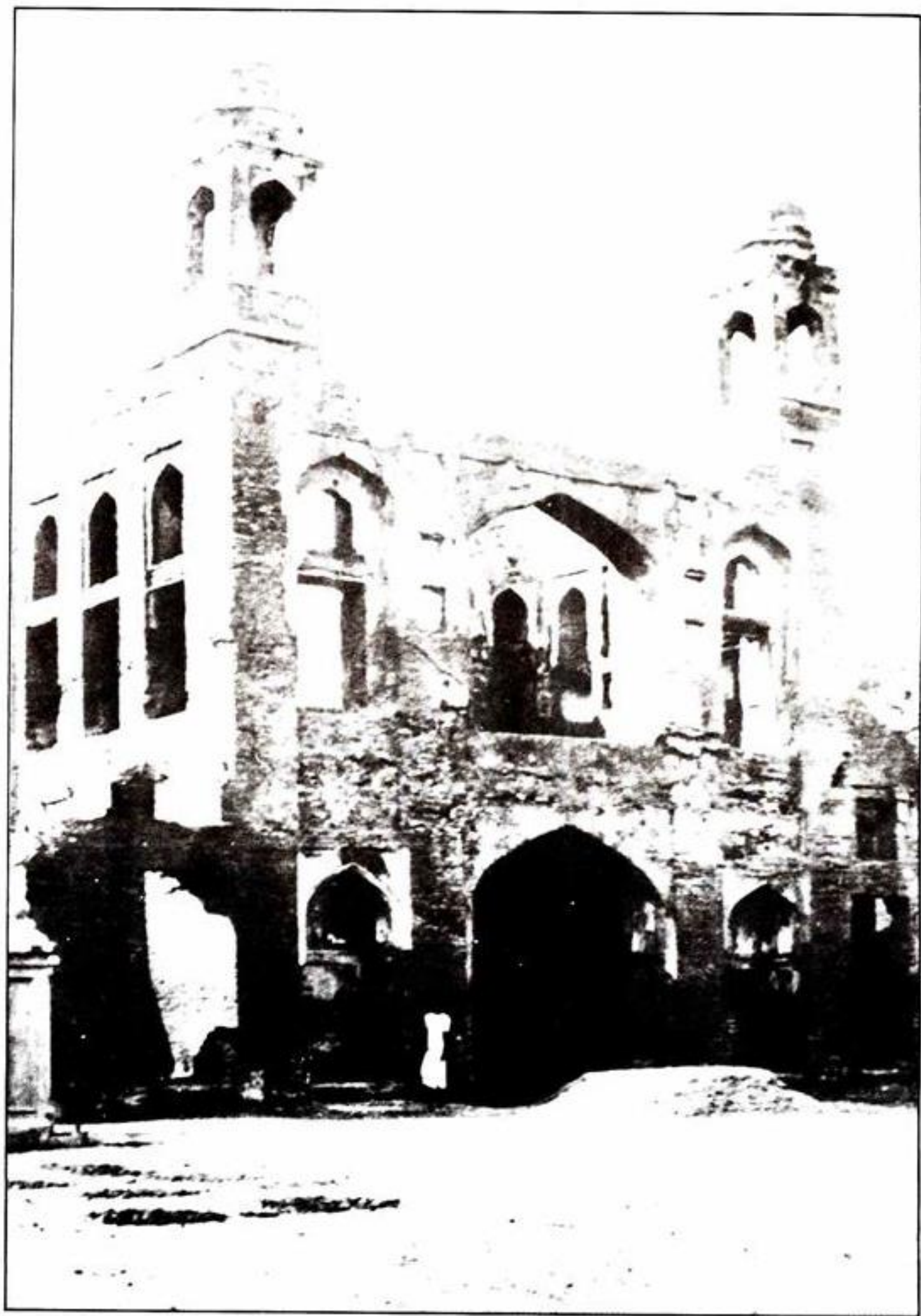


The Nimsarai Tower (end of the 15th century). (Reproduced from *Memoirs*, Fig. 32).

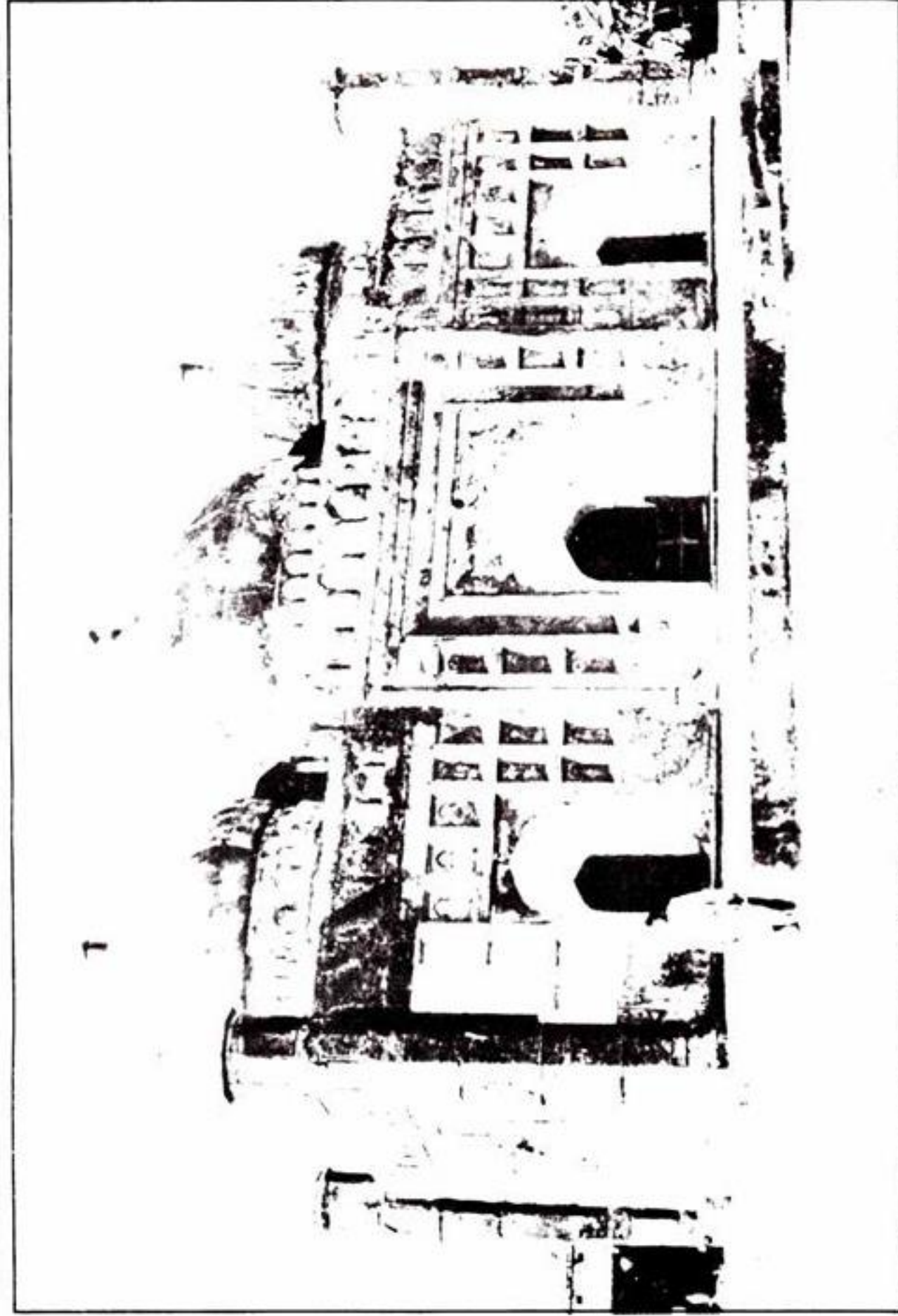
PLATE XXXVII.



Shah N'imat Allah's Mosque, Gaud. (Reproduced from M.A.A. I.P., Pl. 7).

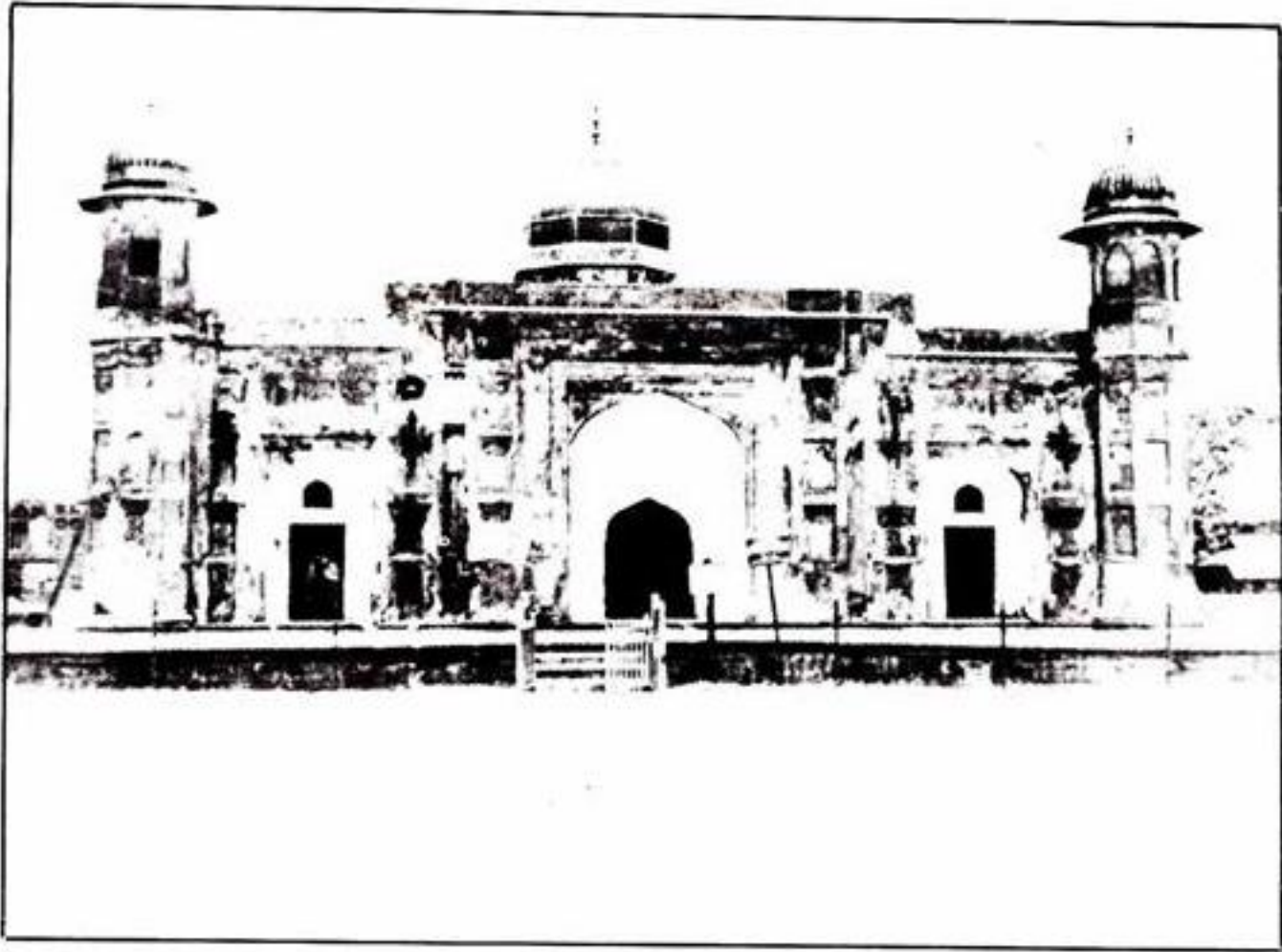


The Gateway of the Lalbagh Fort, Dacca, built in 1678-1679. (Reproduced from *M.A.A.T.P.*, Pl. 3).

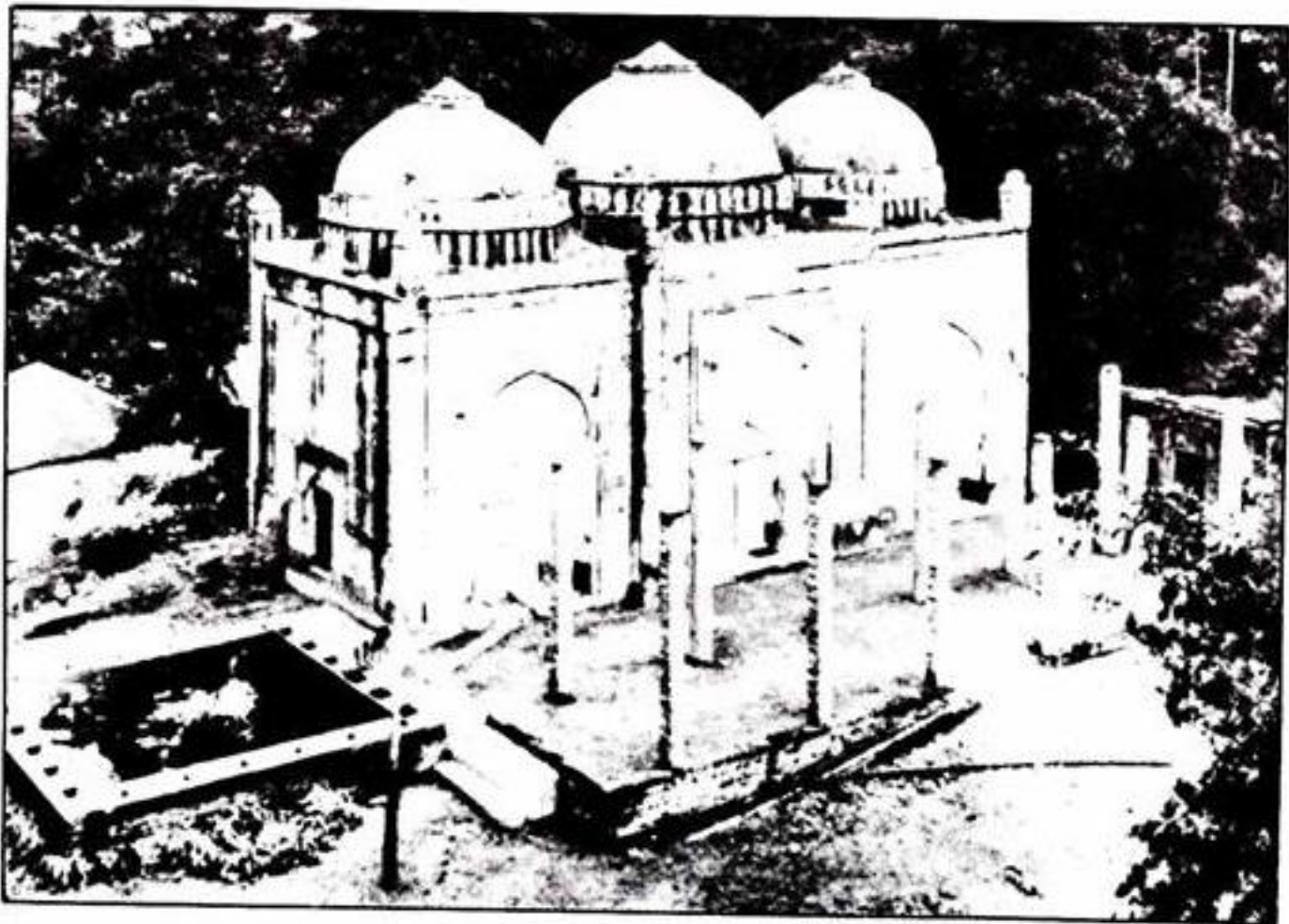


Lalbagh Mosque, Dacca, built by Prince Muhammad A'zam in 1678-1679 & (65' x 32 1/2').
(Reproduced from *M. A. A. J. P.*, Pl. 19b).

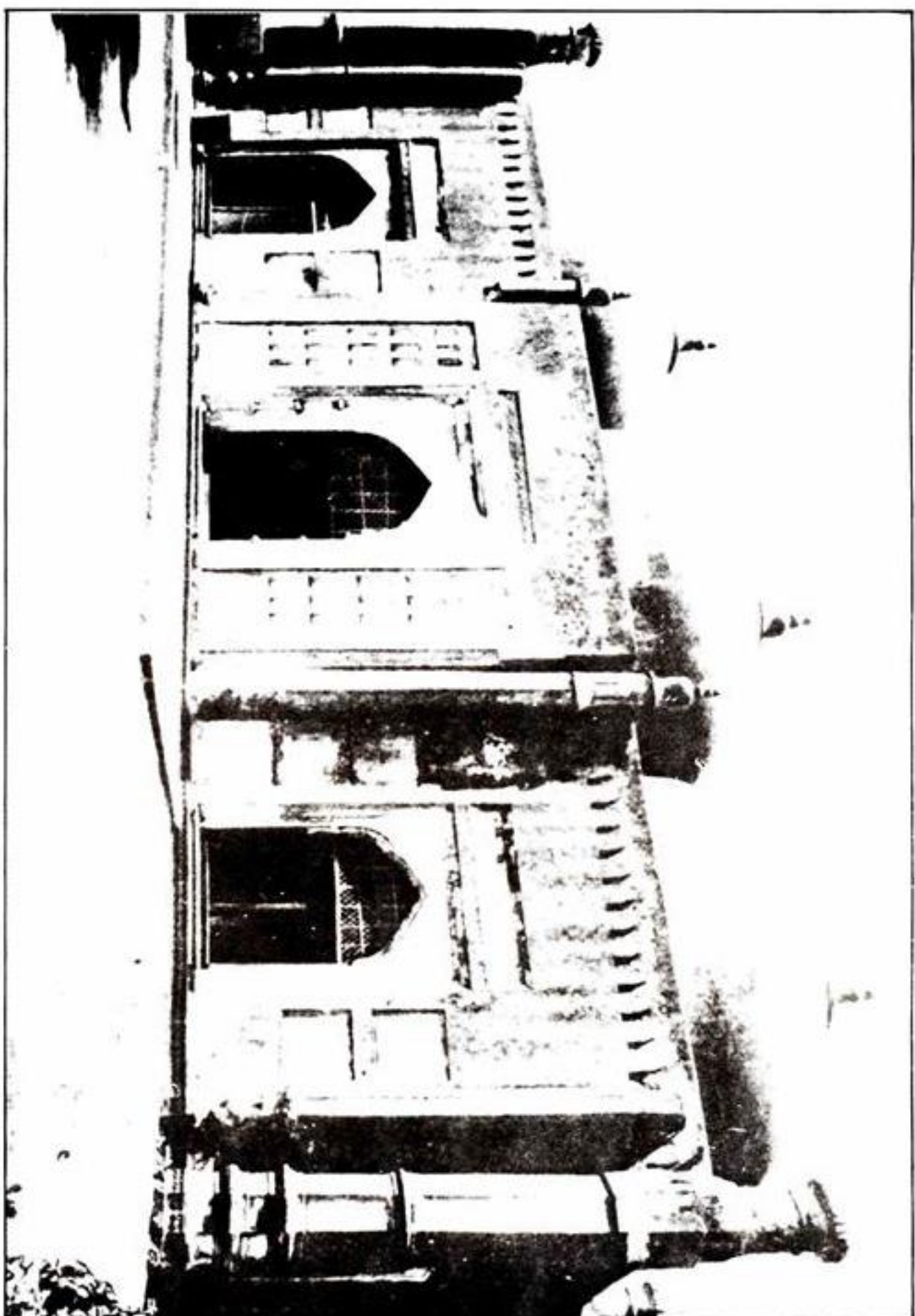
PLATE XL.



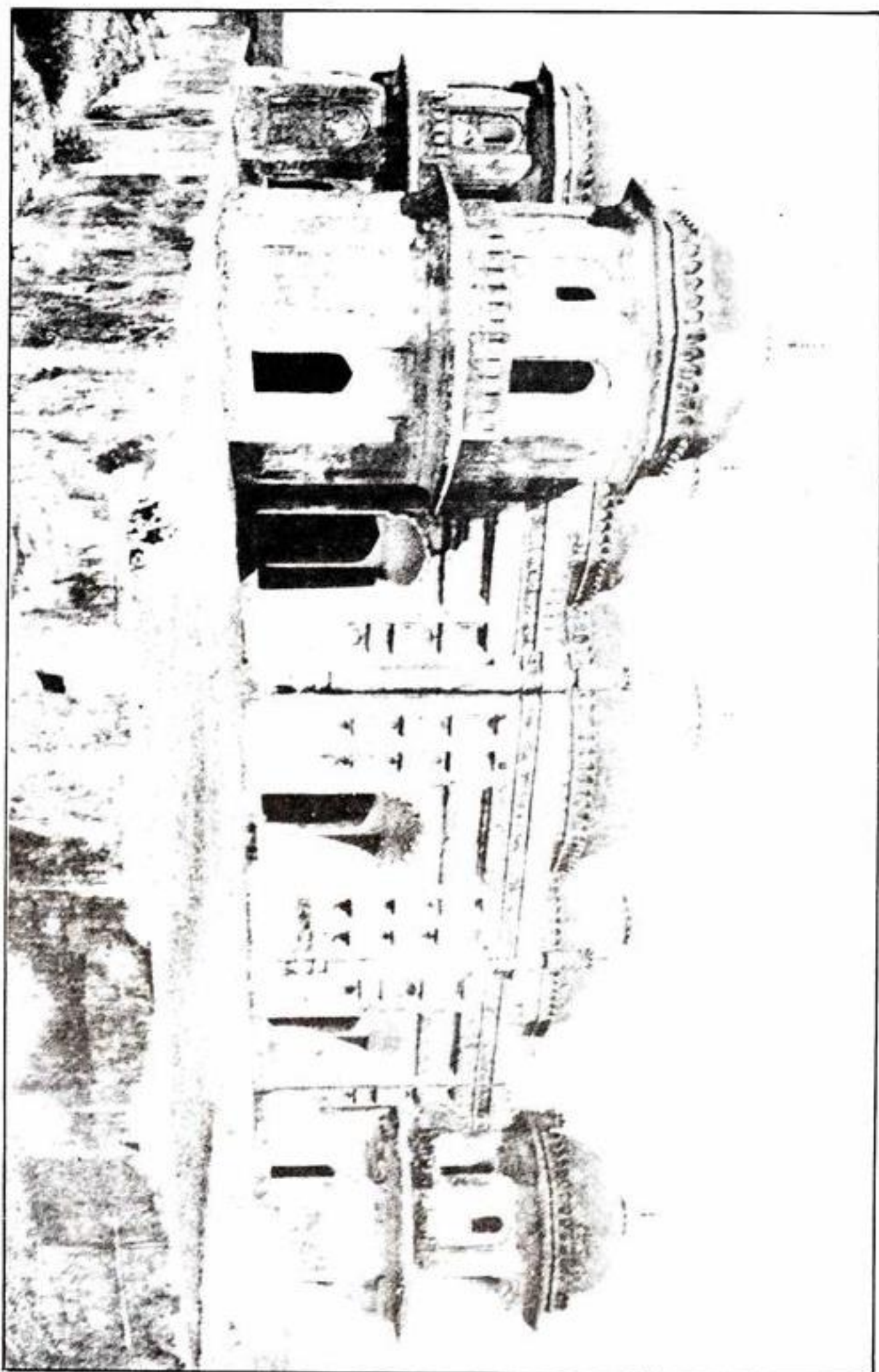
(a) Parī Bibi's Tomb, within the Lālbaḡh Fort, built by Shāista Khān (60 × 60×).
(Reproduced from *M.A.A.T.P.*, Pl. 38).



(b) Bibi Mariam's tomb at Narayanganj. (Reproduced from *M.A.A.T.P.*, Pl. 19g).

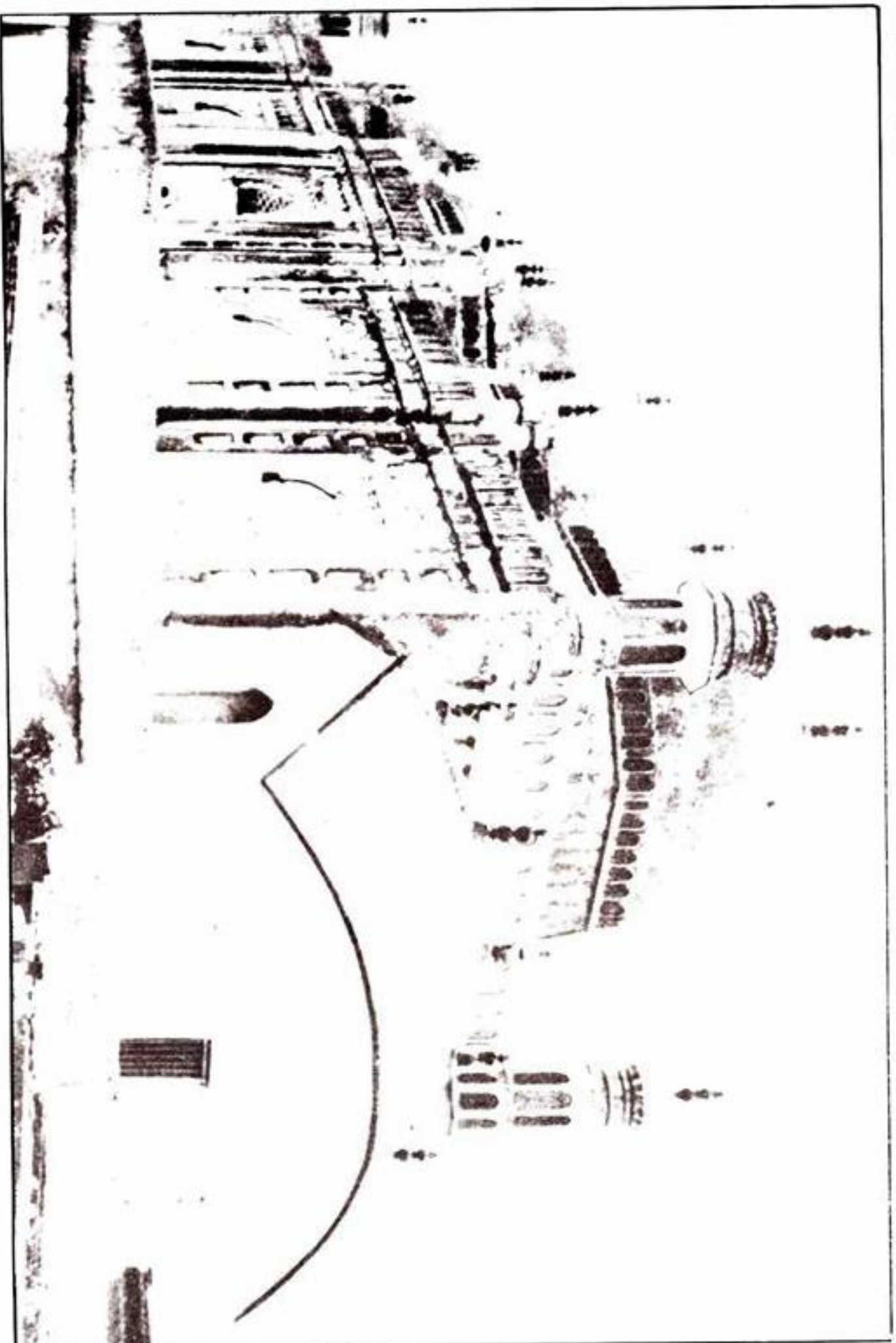


Hajj Khwaja Shabbaz Khan's Mosque, Dacca, built in 1089-1079 (68' x 28'). (Reproduced from *M.A.A.T.P.*, Pl. 19h).

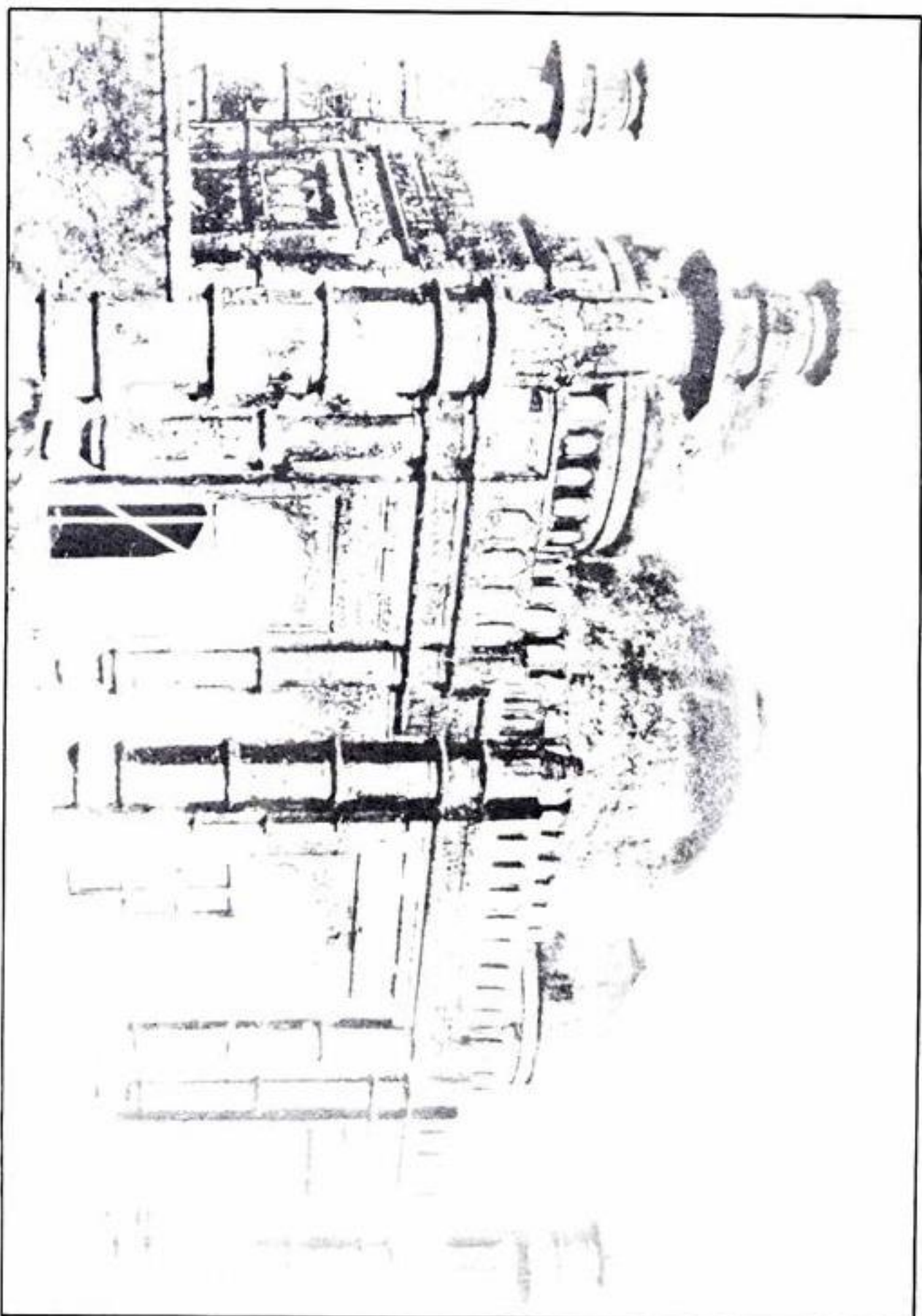


Sāt Gumbad (Seven-domed) Mosque, Dacca, built during Shāista Khān's time (58' × 27').
(Reproduced from *M.A.A.T.P.*, Pl. 6).

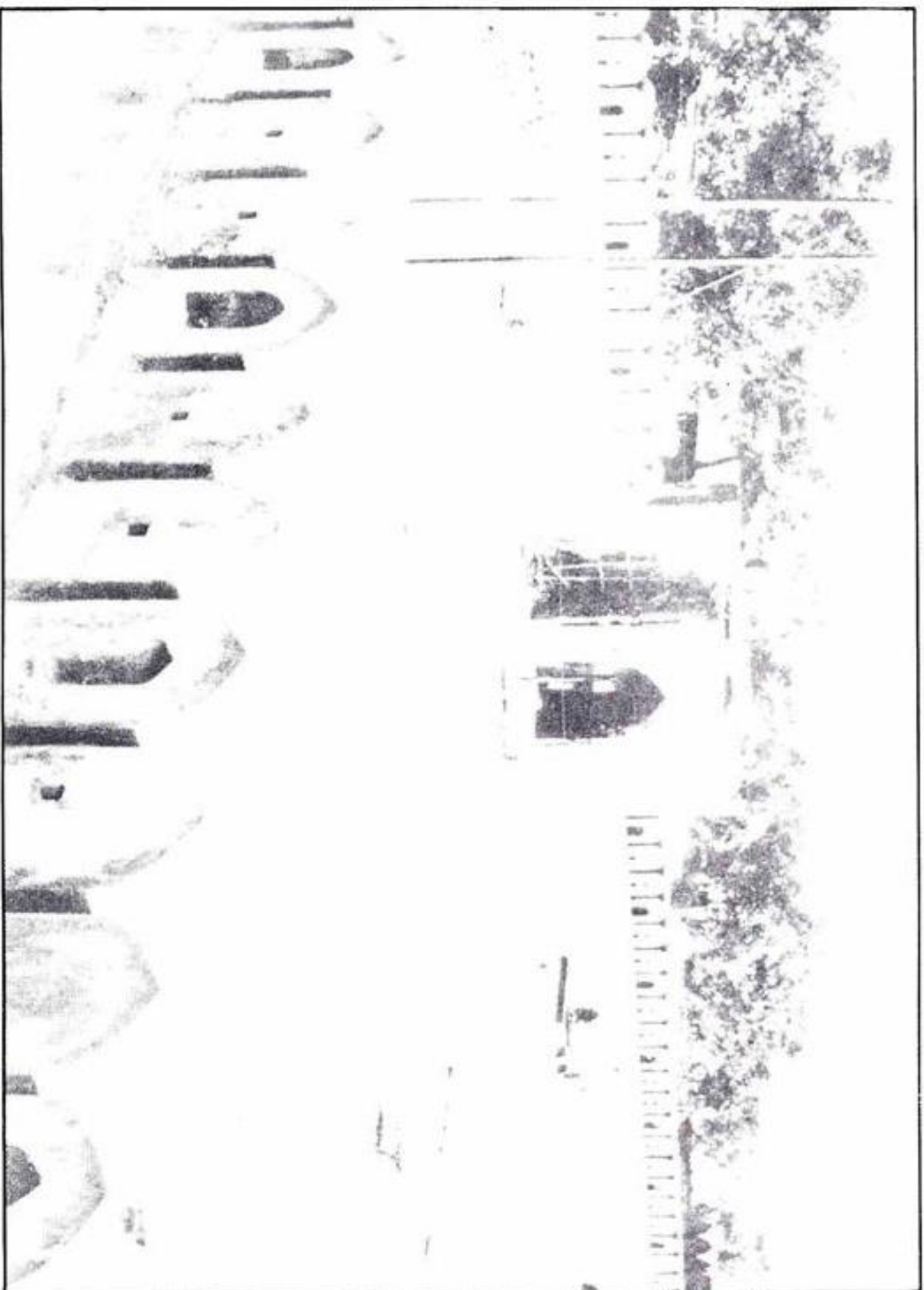
PLATE XLIII.



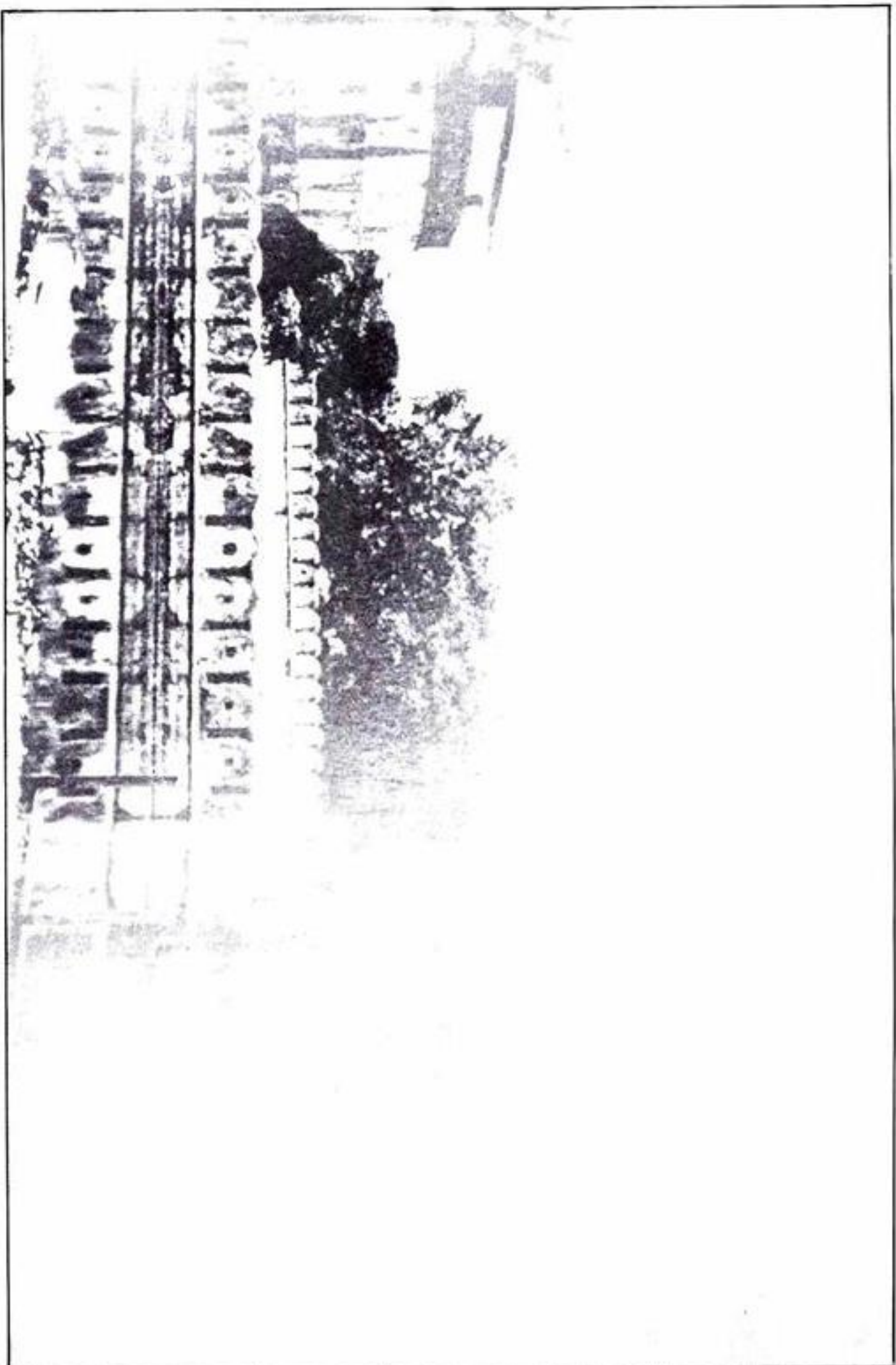
Karalab Khair's Mosque, Begumbazar, Dhacca. (Reproduced from *M. A. A. J. P.*, Pl. 190).



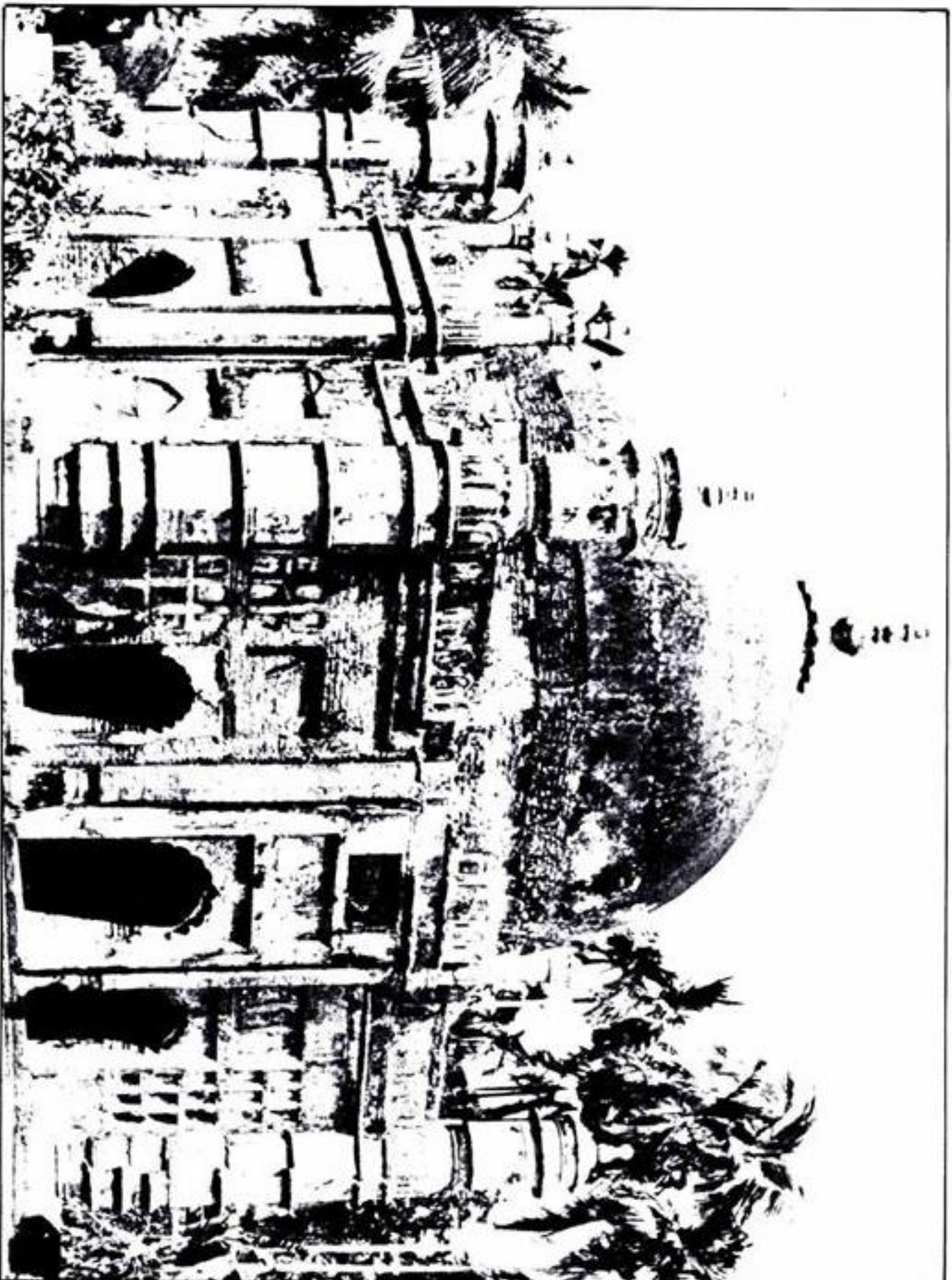
Khān Muhammad Mirdhā's Mosque, Dacca, built in 1176/1706. (Reproduced from *M.A.A.T.P.*, pl. 19).



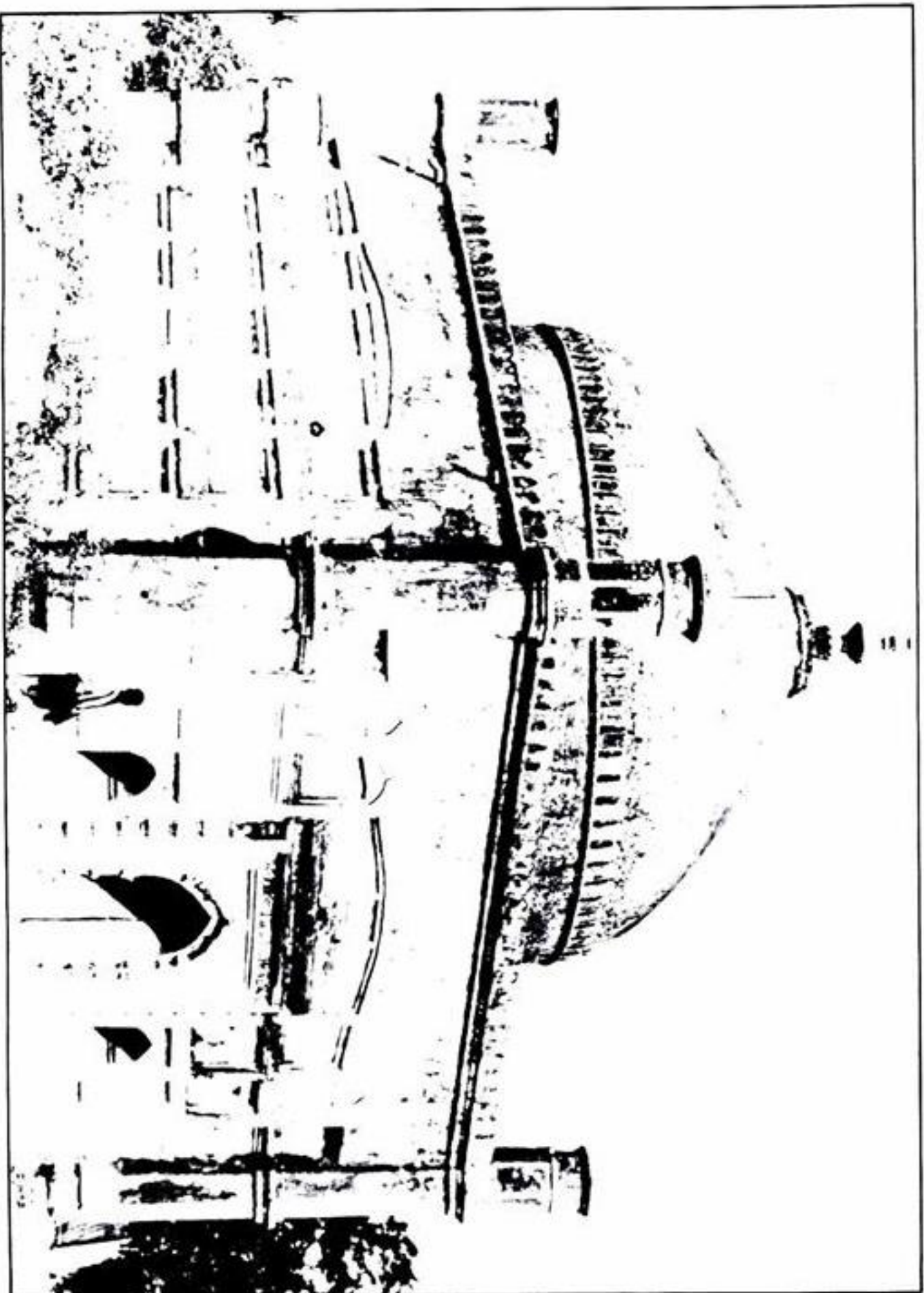
The Sonakanda Fort, Narayangangy, built during Mir Juma's time. (Reproduced from *M.A.A.T.P.*, Pl. 63b).



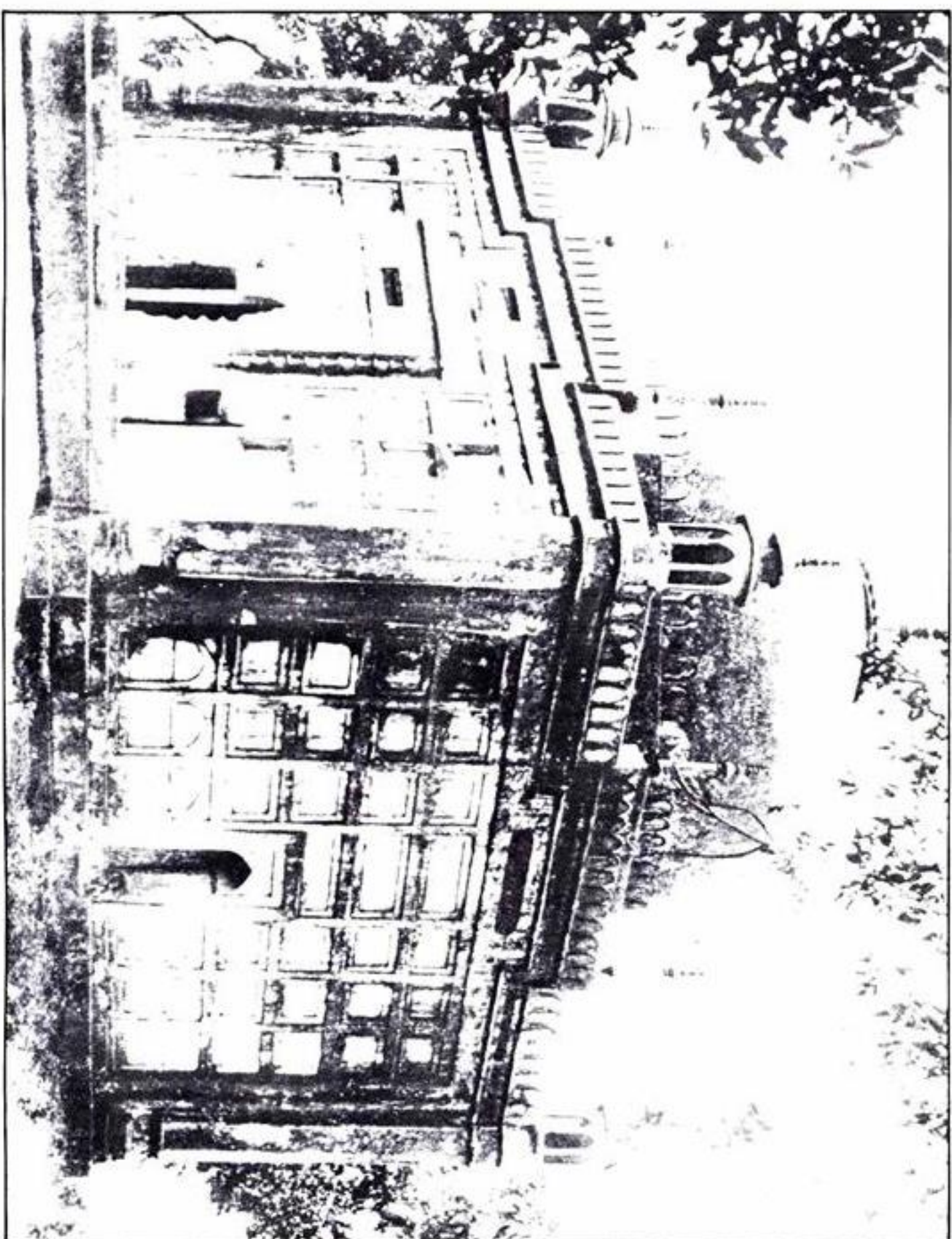
The Idrakpur Fort, Mumbhaganj, built during Mr. Junli's time. (Reproduced from *M.A.A.T.P.*, pl. 63c).



Shah Muhammad's Mosque at Fagarasindur, Kishoreganj. (Reproduced from *M.A.A.T.P.*, Pl. 19c).



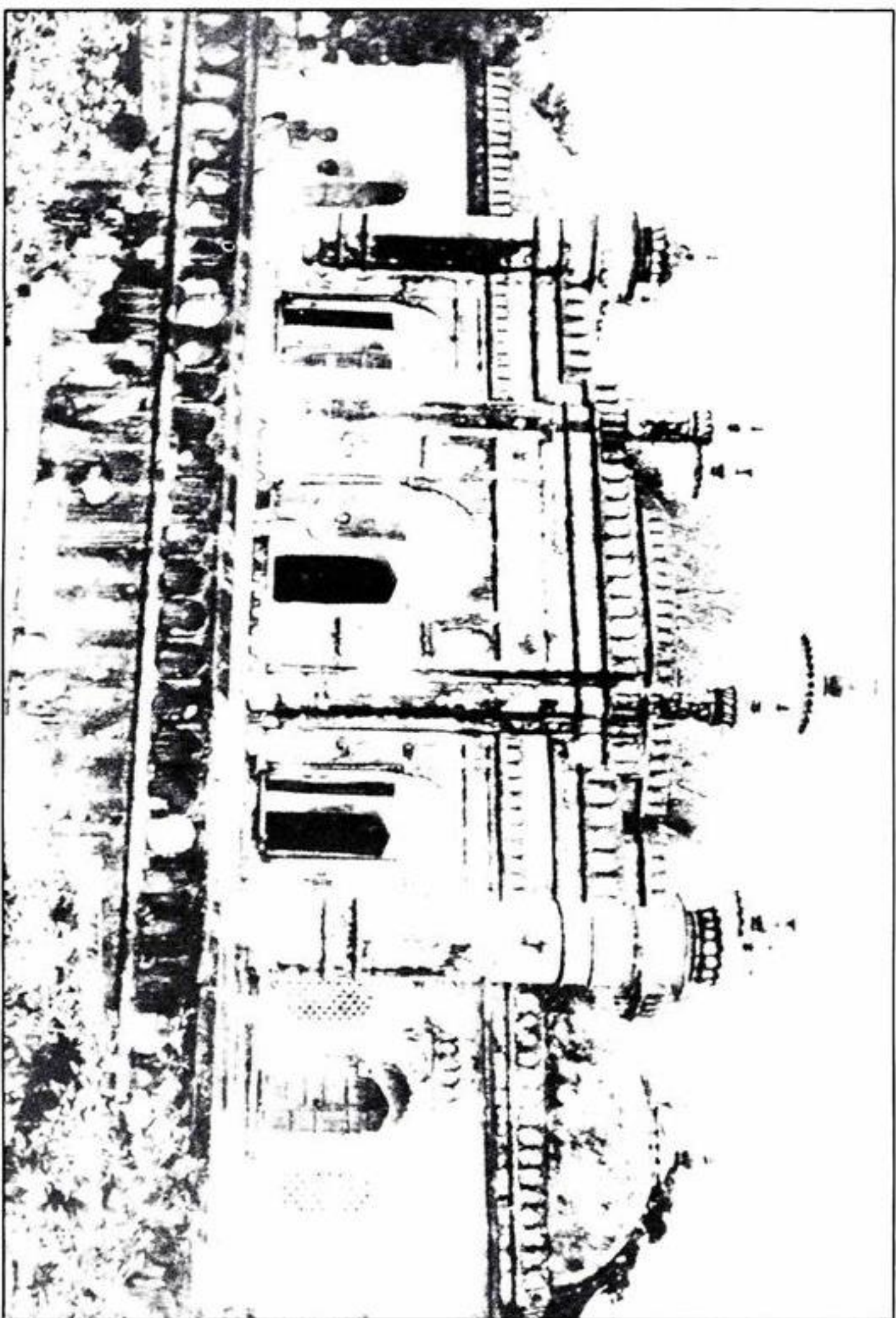
The Masjidpara Mosque, Masjidpara, Kishoreganj. (Reproduced from *M.A.A.T.P.*, p. 190).



The Gurai Mosque, Gurai, Kishoreganj. (Reproduced from *M.A.A.T.P.*, Pl. 190.)



The Aurangzebi Mosque, Chittagong. (Reproduced from *M.A.A.T.P.*, Pl. 191).



The Qadam Mubarak Mosque, Chittagong. (Reproduced from *M.A.A.T.P.*, pl. 198).

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